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Paste

SIGNS *of* LIFE IN MUSIC, FILM & CULTURE

JUNE | JULY 2010

IRANIAN POP FIGHTS THE POWER

BAND OF HORSES RIDES AGAIN

+

GAMING ADDICTS GET HELP

THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM SAVES ROCK 'N' ROLL

AND LILITH FAIR RETURNS

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tilda *ff* swinton

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JUNE | JULY 2010

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EDITORIAL

BY JOSH JACKSON

TRUE INDEPENDENCE

A few months back, we published an 8,000-word cover story on the death of "indie." The meaning of the word may have never been crystal clear, but it makes even less sense now that plenty of uncompromising artists have earned the attention of a much wider audience than their independent forebears. That's certainly true for this month's cover subject, Tilda Swinton.

The Scottish actress' early films—with boundary-pushing directors like Derek Jarman and Sally Potter—thrived in arthouses and film festivals. But as she began to take roles in blockbuster films like *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Michael Clayton* and even the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, her goal of bringing a unique vision to the screen never faltered. Nor did her desire to continue collaborating with upcoming filmmakers on smaller projects, ones where her own vision and ideas could be explored in greater depth. That's just what she's done as the star and producer of Luca Guadagnino's *I Am Love*. She's as independent a spirit as I've met, and that doesn't change even when Disney is paying her bills.

An independent spirit also drives the musicians and moviemakers featured in "Tehran Calling" (pg. 40), assistant editor Michael Saba's feature on the illegal underground-music scene in Iran, where just putting on a rock show can get you arrested.

Closer to home, Band of Horses (pg. 50) have been on quite a journey since I first saw them in a tiny Seattle club when they were just called Horses. They've left the Pacific Northwest and Sub Pop behind, releasing their terrific new album through their own label in partnership with Fat Possum and Columbia, and frontman Ben Bridwell has never seemed more comfortable in his role.

Everywhere you look in this issue, you'll find artists following their own creative muse. Whether they're mixing drinks (pg. 30), reviving a woman-centric music festival (pg. 54) or saving rock 'n' roll (pg. 23), the people in our pages embody creative freedom. And no one word—"indie" or any other—can fully capture that ambition.

paste

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INBOX

PUTTING THE IPOD IN DRY DOCK

The Listening to My Life column "Lost in the Shuffle" (*Paste* #61), by Maura Johnston, really struck a chord with me. I've been a music collector since I received my first vinyl album, *Revolver*, from my brother when I was 14 years old. The sheer volume of my digital music collection is over the top and frankly I usually have it on shuffle and miss so much. I find I can't stop, though; I just keep adding more and more music. I've had thoughts of cutting the digital cord. My first idea was to buy a smaller-capacity iPod and start hitting the delete button. I wouldn't know where to begin. I've also thought of getting rid of it entirely and just continuing to rebuild my vinyl and enjoy music the way I used to. Not a big problem in the scheme of this crazy world, but a conundrum nonetheless... Hey, wait a minute. *The Crazy World of Arthur Brown*? I don't think I have that one on my pod. Better go buy it! **ROBERT NANKIN** { via email }

SURPRISED & DELIGHTED

I don't know what I was expecting when I picked up the somewhat celestial April/May issue, but it was most certainly not—for lack of a more eloquent term—this concentration of awesome. I could ramble to excess about how impressed I am by your work, [including] the "Stereolab, North Carolina" piece. I've lived in N.C. my entire life and have often experienced that same sense of peace Curt Cloninger describes while driving. I grew up on the coast and spent a large portion of my life in cars, listening to music at an unreasonable volume and staring out the window as the landscape shifted from the beach to the Blue Ridge Mountains on long drives. There's a certain delicate beauty to nature outside a car window, flying past at sixty miles an hour. Cloninger has crafted a praiseworthy piece, and I hope that this type of thoughtful interlude is something that will regularly appear in following issues. I feel as though I've been looking for your magazine for years, and I'm so happy to have finally found it. **LAURA ZDANSKI** { Scranton, Pa. }

CRUISIN'

Last year, when *Paste* asked for help until you could restructure, many of us sent what we could. You pulled my name, and I won the Cayamo 2010 cruise to Belize & Mexico. I'm writing to say THANK YOU! This was the best vacation! To be on a ship in the Caribbean for six days with John Hiatt, Lyle Lovett, Brandi Carlile, Steve Earle, Buddy Miller, Robert Earl Keen, Emmylou Harris, Shawn Mullins and "stowaways" Shawn Colvin and Chuck Cannon was amazing. We managed to see all but one of the artists on board, and discovered more than a dozen new ones. All of the artists talked about the "summer camp," atmosphere and the fun they were having collaborating. The people we met on board were friendly and were really there for the music. We'll definitely go back every year. **SHELLEY GARRETT & BERT PAGETT** { Portland, Ore. }

THE DIRECTORS CUT

I enjoyed your article on the 50 Best Living Directors (*Paste* #61), and purchased it because Martin Scorsese was on the cover. One caveat though: I was surprised at Ridley Scott being plunked in so low at #35 in your rankings. Scott has brought some of the most visually arresting films to screen in the past 30 plus years, and he really should be in the top 10—something I'm sure most of the directors ranked above him would agree on. **MIKE BAX** { London, Ontario }

ERRATA

In the reviews section of the April/May issue, *Shiren The Wanderer* was reviewed by Gus Mastrapa, and *Might & Magic* was reviewed by Ryan Kuo.

Paste

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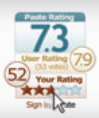
ONLINE

Reviews of new movies *Solitary Man* (above), *Inception* and Animal Collective's *Oddsac*, plus new music from Jimmy Webb, Chatham County Line and Secret Cities.

Live performances from (clockwise from top left) Blue Giant, Harper Blynn, Joe Pug and Jenny Owen Youngs

Add your own user rating to anything reviewed in this issue!



ONLINE Throughout the magazine, this symbol denotes additional content online.
Visit **PasteMagazine.com/JuneJuly10.**

Solitary Man photo by Phil Caruso

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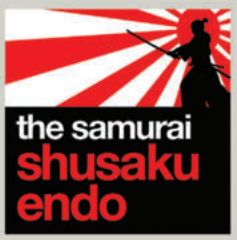
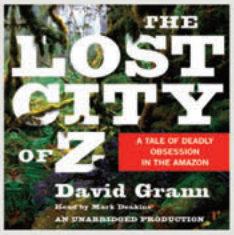
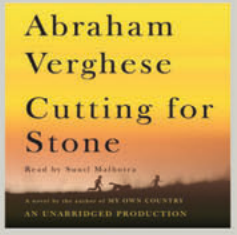
Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter
by Seth Grahame
Narrated by Scott Holst



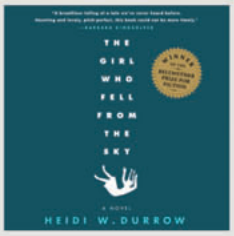
The Samurai
by Shusaku Endo
Narrated by David Holt



The Lost City of Z
by David Grann
Narrated by Mark Deakins



Cutting for Stone
by Abraham Verghese
Narrated by Sunil Malhotra



The Girl Who Fell From the Sky
by Heidi Durrow
Narrated by Karen Murray, Emily Bauer, Kathleen McInerney

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NEW MUSIC SAMPLER

1. FOL CHEN "In Ruins"

(S. Bing) from *Part II: The New December*. ℗Asthmatic Kitty. **Hometown:** Los Angeles. **Website:** asthmatickitty.com

2. TAKE IT EASY HOSPITAL

"Human Jungle" from *No One Knows About Persian Cats*. ℗2009 Milan Entertainment, Inc/D.R. **Hometown:** London. **Website:** milanrecords.com **(PG. 40)**

3. SUCKERS

"Black Sheep" (Suckers) from *Wild Smile*. ℗2010 Frenchkiss Records (BMI). **Hometown:** Brooklyn, N.Y. **Website:** suckersmusic.com **(PG. 34)**

4. ELLIOTT SMITH

"Last Call" (E. Smith) from *Roman Candle*. ℗2010 Kill Rock Stars. Spent Bullets (BMI). **Hometown:** Portland, Ore. **Website:** sweetadeline.net **(PG. 89)**

5. TIFT MERRITT

"Mixtape" (T. Merritt) from *See You On The Moon*. ℗2010 Concord Music Group, Inc. Train Penny Publishing (BMI). **Hometown:** Durham, N.C. & New York. **Website:** tiftmerritt.com **(PG. 76)**

6. PHOSPHORESCENT

"It's Hard To Be Humble (When You're From Alabama)" (M. Houck) from *Here's To Taking It Easy*. ℗2010 Dead Oceans, Inc. Calldown Music (BMI). **Hometown:** Brooklyn, N.Y. **Website:** deadoceans.com **(PG. 86)**

7. TEENAGE FANCLUB

"Baby Lee" (N. Blake/Z. Campbell/J. Collinson-Scott) from *Shadows*. ℗2010 Merge Records. PeMa Songs/Domino Music Publishing. **Hometown:** Glasgow, Scotland. **Website:** teenagefanclub.com **(PG. 75)**

8. SAMANTHA CRAIN

"Lions" (S. Crain) from *You (Understood)*. ℗2010 Ramseur Records. Green Corn Rebellion Music (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Shawnee, Okla. **Website:** samanthacrain.com **(PG. 73)**

9. DEER TICK

"Twenty Miles" from *The Black Dirt Sessions*. ℗2010 Partisan Records. Deer Tick (BMI). **Hometown:** Providence, R.I. **Website:** partisanrecords.com/artists/deer-tick **(PG. 73)**

10. JENNIFER KNAPP

"Dive In" (J. Knapp/P. LaRue) from *Letting Go*. ℗2009 Graylin Records, LLC. Razor & Tie Muisc Publishing, LLC. Wheat & Wattle/Gotee Music (BMI) Admin. by Music Services. Deeper Still Music Publishing/My Maxx Songs/Songs of Razor and Tie (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Chanute, Kan. **Website:** jenniferknapp.com

11. DAMIEN JURADO

"Arkansas" (D. Jurado) from *Saint Bartlett*. ℗2010 Secretly Canadian, Inc. Brown Coat Music (BMI). **Hometown:** Seattle. **Website:** secretlycanadian.com

12. HERE WE GO MAGIC

"Collector" (L.Temple) from *Pigeons*. ℗2010 Secretly Canadian, Inc. Here We Go Magic (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Brooklyn, N.Y. **Website:** secretlycanadian.com **(PG. 75)**

13. TRAMPLED BY TURTLES

"Wait So Long" (D. Simonett) from *Palomino*. ℗2010 Banjodad Records. **Hometown:** Duluth, Minn. **Website:** trampledbyturtles.com

14. HORSE FEATHERS

"Belly of June" (J. Ringle) from *Thistled Spring*. ℗2010 Kill Rock Stars. Justin Ringle/Grand Jean Songs (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Portland, Ore. **Website:** horsefeathersband.com

15. BLITZEN TRAPPER

"Heaven & Earth" (E. Earley) from *Destroyer of the Void*. ℗2010 Sub Pop Records. Long Duck Dong Publishing (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Portland, Ore. **Website:** blitzentrapper.net **(PG. 85)**

16. ELLERY

"Where It's Going" (T. Golden) from *This Isn't Over Yet*. ℗2010 Set Adrift Music (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Cincinnati. **Website:** ellerymusic.com

17. BREATHE OWL BREATHE

"Swimming" (Breath Owl Breathe) from *Magic Central*. ℗2010 Breathe Owl Breathe. **Hometown:** East Jordan, Mich. **Website:** breatheowlbreathe.com **(PG. 33)**

18. JIM LAUDERDALE

"Patchwork River" (J. Lauderdale/R. Hunter) from *Patchwork River*. ℗Thirty Tigers. Wudang Mountain Music (SESAC)/Ice Nine Music (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Nashville, Tenn. **Website:** jimlauderdale.com

19. PETER WOLF

"Tragedy (with Shelby Lynne)" from *Midnight Souvenirs*. ℗2010 PW Recordings, Ltd. under exclusive license to The Verve Music Group. **Hometown:** Boston **Website:** peterwolf.com

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20. EMILY JANE WHITE

"Never Dead" (E. White) from *Victorian America*. ℗2009 Emily Jane White under exclusive license to Milan Entertainment, Inc. Dark Undercoat Publishing. **Hometown:** Fort Bragg, Calif. **Website:** emilyjanewhite.com

21. DARRELL SCOTT

"A Crooked Road" (D. Scott) from *A Crooked Road*. ℗2010 Full Light Records. I Imagine Music (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Nashville, Tenn. **Website:** darrellscott.com

22. ANE BRUN

"Rubber & Soul (feat. Teitur)" (A. Brun) from *Duets*. ℗2005 Balloon Ranger Recordings AB. Sony ATV Music Publishing. **Hometown:** Stockholm, Sweden **Website:** anebrun.com

23. RILEY ETHERIDGE, JR.

"Things I Used to Know" (R. Etheridge) from *Things I Used To Know*. ℗2009 (ASCAP). **Hometown:** New York. **Website:** rileyetheridge.com

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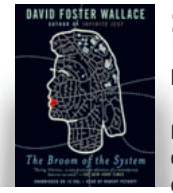

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The Broom of the System

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The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University

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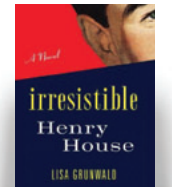

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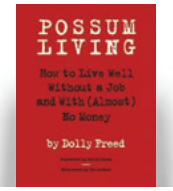
The Irresistable Henry House: A Novel

Reader: Oliver Wyman – An Excerpt from *The Irresistable Henry House: A Novel* Ⓟ 2010 by Audible, Inc. Courtesy of Audible.com

5. MARTIN AMIS

Time's Arrow

Reader: Graeme Malcolm – An Excerpt from *Times Arrow* Ⓟ 2010 by Audible Modern Vanguard. Courtesy of Audible.com



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Possum Living

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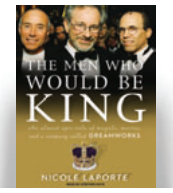
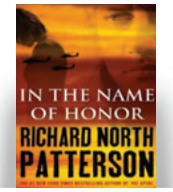


7. NICOLE LAPORTE

The Man Who Would Be King: An Almost Epic Tale of Moguls, Movies, and a Company Called DreamWorks

Reader: Stephen Hoye – An excerpt from *The Man Who Would Be King*. © 2010 Nicole LaPorte. Ⓟ 2010 by Tantor Audio. Courtesy of Tantor Audio



8. RICHARD NORTH PATTERSON

In The Name of Honor

Reader: John Bedford Lloyd – An Excerpt from *In The Name of Honor* © 2010 Richard North Patterson. Ⓟ 2010 by Macmillan Audio. Courtesy of Macmillan Audio

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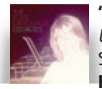

"Heart To Tell" (S. McLamb) from *Libraries*. ℗2010 Merge Records. Stuart McLamb (BMI). **Hometown:** Raleigh, N.C. **Website:** thelovelanguage.com **(PG. 83)**

2. MENOMENA

"Five Little Rooms" (D. Seim/J. Harris/B. Knopf) from *Mines*. ℗2010 Menomena under exclusive license to Barsuk. Muuuhahaha (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Portland, Ore. **Website:** menomena.com **(PG. 82)**

3. SPREE WILSON

"How Long" (S. Wilson) from *The Beauty of Chaos*. ℗2010 Brite Ideas. JY3 Publishing (BMI). **Hometown:** Atlanta. **Website:** myspace.com/spreewilsonexperience

4. ADMIRAL RADLEY

"I Heart California" (J. Lytle/A. Espinoza/A. Murray/A. Burtch) from *I Heart California*. ℗2010 The Ship Records (ASCAP). **Hometown:** California and Montana. **Website:** admiralradley.com

5. BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE

"All To All" (J. Peroff/C. Spearin/S. Goldberg/A. Whiteman/K. Drew/B. Canning/J. McEntire) from *Forgiveness Rock Record*. ℗2010 Arts & Crafts Productions Inc. Gallery AC Music (SOCAN). **Hometown:** Toronto. **Website:** brokensocialscene.com

6. THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM

"American Slang" from *American Slang*. ℗2010 SideOneDummy Records. **Hometown:** New Brunswick, N.J. **Website:** gaslightanthem.com **(PG. 23)**

7. WOLF PARADE

"What Did My Lover Say (It Always Had To Go This Way)" (Wolf Parade) from *Expo86*. ℗2010 Sub Pop Records. WOLFPARADE (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Montreal. **Website:** subpop.com/artists/wolf_parade **(PG. 71)**

8. STARS

"Dead Hearts" from *The Five Ghosts*. ℗2010 Soft Revelution/Vagrant. Stars (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Montreal. **Website:** wearestars.com **(PG. 84)**

9. ANDREW BIRD

"The Twistable, Turnable Man Returns" (words by S. Silverstein, music by A. Bird) from *Twistable, Turnable Man: A Musical Tribute to the Songs of Shel Silverstein* ℗2010 Sugar Hill Records, A Welk Music Group Company. Evil Eye Music, Inc. admin. by TRO-Songways Service, Inc. and Wegawam Music Co., admin. by Chrysalis Songs (BMI). **Hometown:** Chicago. **Website:** twistableturnable.sugarhillrecords.com

10. ICARUS HIMSELF

"Digging Holes" (N. Whetro/K. Christenson/B. Kolberg) from *Mexico* EP ℗2010 Science of Sound Records. Swim Swim Munch Publishing (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Madison, Wis. **Website:** myspace.com/icarushimself

11. BLUE GIANT

"Blue Sunshine" (K. Robinson/A. Robinson) from *Blue Giant*. ℗2010 Vanguard Records, A Welk Music Group Company. Stereophonic Radio Music admin. by Chrysalis Songs (BMI). **Hometown:** Portland, Ore. **Website:** bluegiantland.com **(PG. 83)**

12. JIMMIE VAUGHAN

"Comin' & Goin'" (J. Vaughan) from *Blues, Ballads, & Favorites*. ℗2010 Shout! Factory LLC. Mode Music (BMI) admin. by Bug. **Hometown:** Austin, Texas. **Website:** jimmievaughan.com **(PG. 84)**

13. THE HENRY CLAY PEOPLE

"Your Famous Friends" (J. Siara) from *Somewhere On The Golden Coast*. ℗2010 tbd records. Son of Thad the Mountain Man (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Los Angeles. **Website:** thehenryclaypeople.com **(PG. 81)**

14. ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO

"Street Songs" (A. Escovedo/C. Prophet) from *Street Songs of Love* ℗2010 Concord Music Group. Man From Japan Publishing/Gano L Publishing/Kingsblood Music admin. by Bug Music (BMI). **Hometown:** Austin, Texas. **Website:** alejandroescovedo.com **(PG. 81)**

15. WINTERSLEEP

"New Inheritors" (P. Murphy/T. D'Eon/L. Campbell/M. Bigelow) from *New Ineritors*. ℗2010 The Tom Kotter Company Ltd. Silly Old Song Productions/Gosh Yes Music/D Bones Music/Michael Bigelow (ASCAP/SOCAN). **Hometown:** Halifax, Nova Scotia. **Website:** wintersleep.com

16. THE YOUNG VEINS

"Change" (R. Ross/J. Walker) from *Take A Vacation!* ℗2010 The Young Veins under exclusive license to One Haven Music. Dangerous Blues Music/EMI (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Los Angeles. **Website:** theyoungveins.com

17. PAUL THORN

"You're Not The Only One" (P. Thorn) from *Pimps & Preachers*. ℗2010 Yo Man Music Inc. (BMI). **Hometown:** Tupelo, Miss. **Website:** paulthorn.com **(PGS. 17, 82)**

18. FRONTIER RUCKUS

"Nerves of the Nightmind" (M. Milia) from *Deadmalls & Nightfalls*. ℗2010 Ramseur Records. Orion Songs (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Michigan. **Website:** frontierruckus.com **(PG. 36)**

19. THE SILVER SEAS

"Best Things In Life" from *Chateau Revenge*. ℗2010 Royal Plum Music (BMI). **Hometown:** Nashville, Tenn. **Website:** thesilverseas.net

20. CLOUDEATER

"Decade" (S. Dew/D. Friedman/C. Hunt/K. Scott/N. Kramer) from *Greatest Tragedy*. ℗2010. **Hometown:** Atlanta. **Website:** cloudeatermusic.com

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21. INDIGO GIRLS

"Shame On You (Live, Recorded 11/11/06 at Ventura Theatre)" (A. Ray) from *Staring Down the Brilliant Dream*. ℗2010 Vanguard Records, A Welk Music Group Company. IG Recordings, LLC. Godhap Music (BMI) **Hometown:** Decatur, Ga. **Website:** indigogirls.com

22. TREVOR HALL

"The Lime Tree" (T. Hall/S. Markus) from *Chasing the Flame: On the Road with Trevor Hall* ℗2010 Vanguard Records. A Welk Music Group Company. Burtannie Publishing/ssmarkus publishing (BMI). **Hometown:** Laguna Beach, Calif. **Website:** myspace.com/trevorhall

23. THE ROBERT CRAY BAND

"Chicken In The Kitchen" (R. Cray) from *Cookin' in Mobile, Live CD+DVD*. ℗2010 Nozzle Records/Vanguard Records, A Welk Music Group Company. Robert Cray Music (BMI). **Hometown:** Los Angeles. **Website:** robertcray.com

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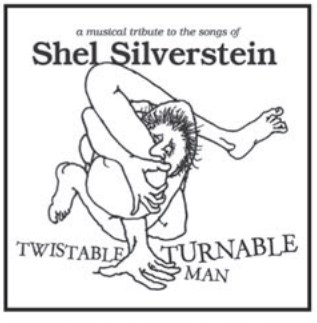

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THE BLACK KEYS
BROTHERLY LOVE

You'd never mistake them for biological brothers, but spend a lunch with Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney and the title of the newest Black Keys album seems fitting. Seated in the corner of a small, slightly dilapidated, mostly empty Korean restaurant on the outskirts of Akron, Ohio, they seem less interested in discussing their album than in catching up with each other, something that hasn't been so easy since Carney moved to New York City a few months back. After eight years of making Black Keys records, 2009 was a working vacation. Singer/guitarist Auerbach released a solo album, Carney founded an all-drummer side project, and the duo collaborated with a team of hip-hop MCs under the moniker BlakRoc. *Brothers* (review pg. 57) is the sound of a homecoming.

Carney, tall and toothy with Buddy Holly glasses, is particularly ADD today, deflecting most serious questions to hold court on topics ranging from condescending hosts at Applebee's to fat people in airports and Kim Jong-il's haircut. Auerbach laughs loudly and often, clearly enjoying Carney's every off-topic aside. They talk about Akron, about how little there is to do in their hometown and how most everyone they once knew there has moved away. But Auerbach won't say he resents Carney leaving him behind in Akron. "I send him a lot of texts," he says dryly. "'Thinkin' 'boutcha. LOL.'"

Aiming for a counterpoint to 2008's *Attack & Release*, the duo's kaleidoscopic psych-garage record produced by Danger Mouse, they were ready to return to their rougher-around-the-edges roots. Since most of those roots run deeply into the South, it made sense to trace them to Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, the sacred Alabama site of some of soul music's definitive sessions, from Aretha to Wilson Pickett. Now owned by an eccentric northerner who lives in the building's basement and occasionally pops up to give life advice, the studio has seen better days.

"You could tell in '67, or whenever the place was opened, that it had a very futuristic '50s, '60s vibe," Auerbach explains. "But the shit that was there was not up to snuff. You'd rest on it, and the whole left channel would go out. It was that kind of deal."

Fortunately, the Keys brought their own equipment, and their first-take-best-take approach suited the glammy T. Rex grooves, harpsichord-tinged dirges, and simmering soul ballads that turn up among their usual barrage of gnarled garage blues riffs. And while four of the tracks were recorded in Akron, a permanent return seems unlikely. "Dan and I are moving to Florida. And we're going to get a condo in Arizona," Carney says.

"And a cottage in New England," Auerbach adds. **MATT FINK**

Photo by John Peets

Photo by Mark Seliger

SHERYL CROW MY FIRST...

Growing up in the bootheel of Missouri, Sheryl Crow would make the trip down to Memphis about twice a year with her family, usually to see Santa Claus or buy school clothes. When she grew up, she hung out at venues like the now-closed Bombay Bicycle Club and became enthralled with the lore of Bluff City and its vivacious musical history. Her eighth studio album and first soul project, *100 Miles from Memphis*, is informed by the music of Stax, Hi and Sun Records, as well as her memories of the place. "Memphis has always been mystical for me," Crow says, "so this record is about emotion, about love and sensuality. It should be the kind of record that people could lose themselves in."

STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

HER FIRST INSTRUMENT: "I grew up playing piano. Everybody in my family took lessons, but I realized at a very early age that I could play by ear. I remember going into our living room, turning off all the lights and pretending I was Stevie Wonder."

THE FIRST TIME SHE HEARD MEMPHIS MUSIC: "I grew up with all of that stuff. That's what we listened to at home. My parents played a lot of rhythm and blues. They were in a swing band and loved all kinds of music. I grew up knowing who Mavis was, who Aretha was, who Al Green was. I don't remember not knowing that music."

THE FIRST TIME SHE PLAYED MEMPHIS: "We played Mud Island, and it was a huge deal because that was the first time anybody from my hometown could come and see me. The entire town got in cars and buses and drove down. It was a little nerve-racking. Everyone I've ever known in my life was there. But it was a great feeling: There's a big legacy there for live music, so I felt like I was being welcomed into the fray."

THE FIRST TIME SHE WENT TO GRACELAND: "I went with my band about ten years ago, and I didn't know what to expect. I was worried that it was going to be a little cheesy, but I was absolutely emotional about it. It's a lot smaller than you think it's going to be. They call it 'the mansion' but it's actually the size of a pretty basic house. They give you headphones and you walk through—you listen to Elvis tell you about his house. There's something really surreal about that. It was very affecting for all of us. We were cynical when we went in, but we came out of it feeling like we had experienced something cool."

THE FIRST SONG THAT REALLY CLICKED DURING THE *100 MILES* SESSIONS: "I wrote a song at the piano called 'Stop'," which is a throwback to The Stylistics or The Temptations. When we recorded it, we all sunk into the music. We knew we were on the right track. We started putting strings and horns and back-up singers on it, and it just started coming together in a very committed way."

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TEXTS, TWEETS AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SAVED THE SUNSET STRIP

It's past midnight on a Saturday, and Hollywood's Sunset Strip is bustling. Neon signs buzz above the street, honoring its flashy legacy. Outside The Roxy Theatre, clusters of teens wielding cell phones and lip gloss mingle amidst black-clad rockers. More than 500 people are jammed inside the cavernous venue, which in the mid 1980s showcased acts like Jane's Addiction and Guns N' Roses. Tonight, the club hosts the second annual Zombie Prom, featuring up-and-coming rock quartet Saint Motel. After word of the show blasted across cyberspace to the Roxy's more than 27,000 Twitter followers, it sold out before the doors opened.

"I saw her tweets," says a guy called The Hawk, nodding at the woman standing next to him. "And she saw mine." The Hawk is a lanky character with blue-black hair and a patch over his right eye, a Strip regular who co-hosts the weekly Ustream show *The Real Sunset Strip,* filmed every Saturday from the heart of the scene.

"We both checked in on Foursquare," he continues, "So I knew she was here."

The woman goes by @absolut420jen, a 32-year-old self-proclaimed "Sunset Stripper" who does the office by day and the Strip by night.

Strip regulars often refer to each other by their Twitter handles—a habit more Silicon than Sunset. "It's really nerdy," admits Roxy owner Nic Adler. But it makes sense. Once a repository for spandex-clad metal bands and rock 'n' roll debauchery, the Strip has now embraced its inner geek.

Sunset Boulevard is just a street, a corridor leading travelers from Los Angeles' grittier East Side toward the ocean. But the Sunset Strip—a 1.6-mile stretch of that street, book-ended by the Chateau Marmont and Doheny Drive—has long been more than a road. It's an *idea,* one that has revolved around velvet-roped exclusivity since its '70s and '80s heyday. The Strip was home to some of America's most storied clubs and venues—The Roxy, Whisky A Go-Go, The Comedy Store and The Viper Room—which, enamored with their own mystique, shuttered their doors to throngs of would-be customers (and also to each other). Eventually, people got sick of being shut out, so L.A.'s rock scene moved east to more inviting neighborhoods. And the Strip watched in the mid-2000s as its significance shrank. "I was reading these web sites and blog posts that were saying, 'Oh my god, Echo Park and Silver Lake are amazing,' and then there was nothing about the Sunset Strip," Adler says. "We were basically losing ground."

And so, a year ago, Adler did the unthinkable: He teamed up with his rival venues, shook off the Strip's old reputation and reached out to a new generation of customers using social-networking technology. Clubs up and down the street have partnered to form the "The Social Strip"—a nod to their new way of doing business by tweets, tumbls and texts. Their online arsenal has expanded from Twitter posts to Ustream shows, an upcoming Sunset Strip iPhone app, and their Tweet Crawl events—a classic bar crawl gone digital. "Technology is our tool belt," explains Nathan Levinson, marketing director at the Viper Room, the rock mecca that Johnny Depp once owned. "It's the philosophy that is important. The approach you take with the tools—how you use them."

The cyber strategy works. Attendance at the Viper Room and Roxy is up about 30 percent, clubs have diversified their booking beyond macho rock and an eclectic new scene is beginning to overshadow the tired image from the past.

"We want to let people know that we are an epicenter of laughter and music in Los Angeles," Levinson says. "It never went away—we're still here. We just needed to remind people." **LIZ STINSON**

Photo by Stephanie Rhea

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE WITH PAUL THORN

Paul Thorn was raised in Mississippi and spent his youth as a middleweight boxer. After getting his ass kicked by Roberto Duran in 1988, he turned to music. He's written enough songs to have a greatest-hits record, and his new LP *Pimps & Preachers* is out now, but he may be just as well-known as a yarn-spinning storyteller. So we asked him to tell us three tales—two true, and one not. We bet you can't tell the difference. **NICK MARINO**

STORY 1

It was the last jump of the day. All I had on was a pair of shorts, flipflops and a parachute. I exited the plane at 14,000 feet and free fell toward the earth at 120 miles per hour. As I plummeted, it started raining. At that speed of descent, the raindrops stung me like liquid bees. I rolled into a ball to try and protect my exposed skin from the elements as a sudden wind blew me dangerously away from the landing zone. When I pulled my ripcord the chute opened, but I had to land in the middle of a busy interstate. Cars swerved to miss me as I landed hard on the concrete. When I woke up in the back of an ambulance, I was thankful to be alive.

STORY 2

My uncle once told me, "Creative restraint in a man brings out intense passion in a woman." He proved this to me as we sat on a couch at a friend's house with six other men in the room, watching a pretty girl dance seductively to a boom box playing Def Leppard's "Pour Some Sugar On Me." We all sat there with our tongues hanging out. As the girl swayed to the music, my uncle whispered in my ear and told me to stop watching her. He said, "Pick up a magazine and pretend to read it." I didn't understand his request but I managed to put my eyeballs back in my skull and browsed through a *Field & Stream* that was on the coffee table. Suddenly, she singled me out and started giving me a lap dance. As she gyrated on my trembling knee caps I wanted to look, but I stood my mental ground and focused on an article about fly fishing in Alaska. Out of nowhere my uncle looked at me and said it was time to go. When we walked out to our car, she followed us outside in her stone-washed Daisy Dukes and Chuck Taylor low-tops. As we were backing out she tried to kiss me through the passenger-side window. I literally had to push her upper torso out of the vehicle as we drove away. In the rear-view mirror I could see her standing there with a confused, hungry look on her face.

STORY 3

Two years ago my wife caught me French kissing a fan at one of my shows and filed for divorce. She poured her wrath out on me like hot grits. She even hooked up with my best friend to give me a taste of my own medicine. I said I was sorry, but nothing I tried could soften the hard shell that she had built around her broken heart. In a last-ditch effort I drove to a local radio station and asked the DJ to dedicate Poison's "Every Rose Has Its Thorn" to her from me. She heard my plea as she was driving home from work, and she melted like butter. That night we had a romantic meal at Bonanza and were reunited as a couple. We went home and made sweet, sweet love. The hickey on her inner thigh didn't even bother me. The past is the past. The power of Bret Michaels' music had saved our marriage.

ONLINE Visit PasteMagazine.com/JuneJuly10 to see which of Paul Thorn's stories is a load of crap.

EARS WE TRUST

Justin Gage of Aquarium Drunkard

Based in Los Angeles, Gage is the founder of Autumn Tone Records and the influential music blog Aquarium Drunkard. He is also the host and program director for the weekly Aquarium Drunkard Show on Sirius XMU. Here's what he's listening to and loving.

SUSAN CHRISTIE
Paint A Lady **(FINDERS KEEPERS)**
Psychedelic folk jams from 1970. Out of print for years, like Karen Dalton, but one can now draw a straight line from Christie to the likes of Joanna Newsom.

PYLON ***Gyrate*** **and** ***Chomp*** **(DFA)**
Wayyyy ahead of their time. Kudos to DFA for reissuing Athens, Ga.'s post-punk trailblazers.

HARLEM ***Hippies*** **(MATADOR)**
Beautifully unhinged, Lenny Kaye-approved blasts of Texas garage rock.

ROBERT POLLARD/BOSTON SPACESHIPS ***We All Got Out Of The Army*** **and** ***The Planets Are Blasted*** **(GBV, INC)**
A late-career comeback if ever there was one. Detractors take note.

LINK WRAY ***Link Wray*** **(HIP-O SELECT)**
Make no mistake, this 1971 record is not Wray in instrumental surf-guitar mode. Here the man handles all the vocals, belting out greasy, back-porch rock 'n' roll gospel-blues.

the PASTE 7

OUR FAVORITE SCOTTISH BITS OF WHATEVER

1 Michael Saba, Assistant Editor → *Trainspotting* Danny Boyle's sophomore film almost makes heroin seem glamorous, but then an Exorcist-baby crawls on the ceiling and you're left nervously thumbing your rosary, swearing you'll Choose Life.

2 Nick Marino, Managing Editor → Kelvingrove Park Glasgow is an industrial town by repute, but its heart is this rough-cut emerald, which ranks among the world's great greenspaces. Windy footpaths and bushy landscaping transport park-goers to a mystical Shire-like realm, towered over by the local university's great gothic spires.

3 Josh Jackson, Editor-In-Chief → "Good Arms Vs. Bad Arms" Frightened Rabbit reverts me to teenage fandom. Someone get me a folder to doodle the band's logo on during Spanish class! What, no logo? Then just play the live version of this song off the Scottish quintet's *Liver! Lung! FR!* EP.

4 Kevin Keller, Multimedia Producer → Old Chub Scottish Style Ale Appearances can be deceiving—this fearsome-looking dark beer from Colorado's Oskar Blues Brewery is actually as sweet (and malty) as can be. The smooth texture draws you in, and the rich chocolate and coffee flavors will make you order a second.

5 Austin L. Ray, Web Editor → Groundskeeper Willie Relentlessly furious and gloriously unrefined, the *Simpsons* custodian makes most small-screen supporting characters seem pathetic by comparison. May he live long and wrestle many wolves.

6 Rachel Dovey, Assistant Editor → Isobel Campbell The former Belle & Sebastian cellist is Scottish by birth but global in reach. For her last decade's worth of excellent albums, she's recruited artists as diverse as Scottish jazz pianist Bill Wells and former Screaming Trees frontman Mark Lanegan.

7 Rachel Maddux, Associate Editor → Scotch Tape It's hardly a legit U.K. export—it was invented in Minnesota and is produced by the 3M corporation—but its varieties bear the trademark tartan plaid, and the name has become synonymous with convenient household adhesives. I recommend the near-invisible Gift Wrap Tape!

Isobell Campbell photo by Autumn de Wilde. Frightened Rabbit photo by Jannica Honey. Justin Gage photo by David Studarus

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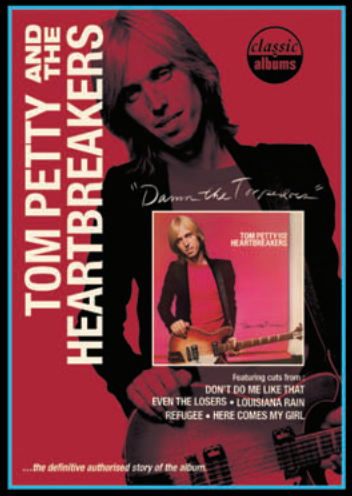
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BLK JKS HOMETOWN HEROES TAKE CENTER STAGE AT THE WORLD CUP

Like most boys growing up in Johannesburg, the members of experimental-rock quartet BLK JKS once imagined making soccer their profession. "For any kid in South Africa, Africa—or, I guess, anywhere in the world—to be a sportsman or a musician or a superhero is the way to go," says guitarist Mpumi Mcata. "These are the things you dream of, the things you want to do."

But as "professional athlete" and "caped crusader" began looking like unrealistic career options, the would-be footballers turned their attention toward music. Earlier this summer, they combined at least two of their early ambitions, playing the opening concert for the 2010 World Cup, on June 10 in their hometown, joining Black Eyed Peas, Alicia Keys, John Legend, Angelique Kidjo and Amadou & Mariam.

For many South Africans, hosting the ultimate soccer tournament means more than the promise of economic stimulation or a boost to the nation's infrastructure. The country was expelled from most international athletic competition because of apartheid, but since the national team stopped segregating in 1992, South Africa has made up for lost time. They qualified for the 1998 and 2002 World Cups, and won the African Nations Cup, which they hosted in '96.

"It's hard not to look at it romantically and politically in a grand fashion," Mcata says. "For a young nation, it's like the stamp on the idea of progress and the fact that we've worked our way into being the so-called first world. It's kind of the cherry on top, but it of course doesn't mean it's the end of our problems."

For the four musicians of BLK JKS, each from a different South African tribe, there's a personal parallel to this feeling of arrival—they've already made an impact playing music, but nothing compared to the World Cup stage. "We're so young and we've been working at it for a while," says Mcata. "This is, we feel, our biggest moment."

And for that moment, they have "Zol!," a song that could become a national rallying cry. The title track of their new EP, it's an ecstatic call-and-response tune based on a traditional street rally. "When that song happened, we were in Paris and kind of missing home," Mcata says. "As usually happens when you're away from home, you sing struggle songs from the revolution or traditional songs to remember home. This song, we sang while we were there, on the tour buses. We want to preserve or document—things like that shouldn't go by. It was a song for the people by the people, and we felt like it should be put down because it hasn't been before." **JOSH JACKSON**

Photo by Jason Nocito

WEB'S BACK PAGES
ROCK MAGS GET ARCHIVED ONLINE

If the Web is a celestial jukebox—a repository for nearly every piece of music you've ever encountered—it's increasingly the same for old music mags, particularly if you have neither the space nor wherewithal to keep your own back issues lying around. Archival websites now abound, and re-reading the publications that introduced and clarified the music we hold dear—or even the stuff we forgot we once cared about—is as powerful a nostalgia rush as the music itself.

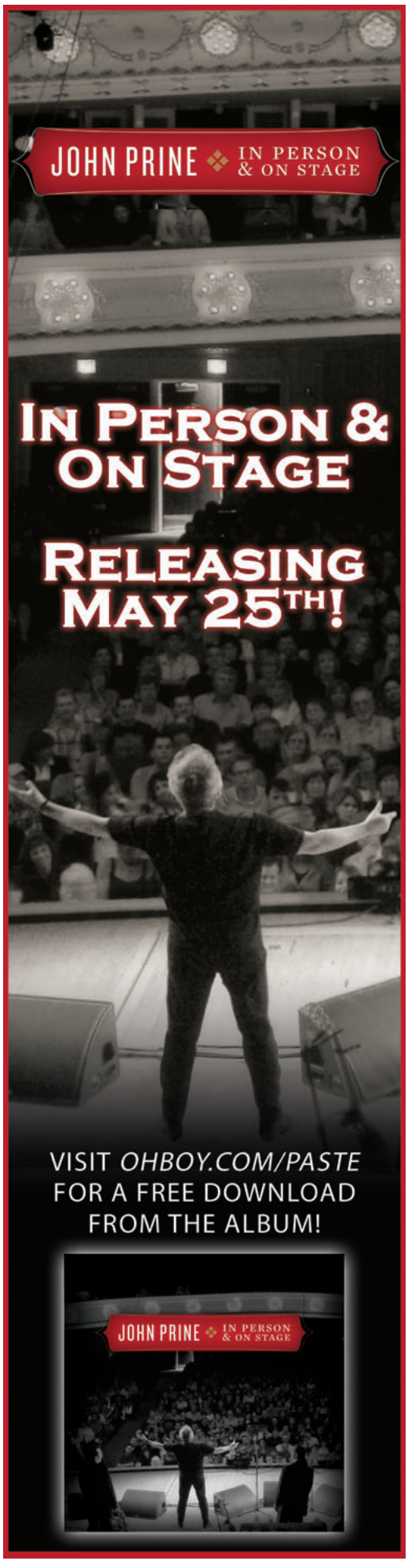
The archival granddaddy, founded in 2000 by veteran English scribe Barney Hoskyns, is Rock's Backpages (rocksbackpages.com). The self-proclaimed "online library of rock writing" culls some 16,000 reviews, features, scene reports, overviews and essays from hundreds of sources, navigable by artist, writer, genre/topic (Britpop, gospel, punk), and publication. All that access comes with a cost: While there are plenty of freebies, accessing the whole site will set you back $200 for an annual subscription.

A homier (and more affordable) site called Archived Music Press (archivedmusicpress.wordpress.com) emerged two years ago as a showcase for homemade scans (by an Englishman named Charles) of pieces from British weeklies *NME* and *Melody Maker* between 1987 and 1996. David Stubbs' scabrous "Mr. Agreeable" columns are especially recommended. Stubbs' *Maker* colleague Simon Reynolds' own Reynolds Retro (reynoldsretro.blogspot.com) mines his intellectually voracious musings—sometimes scanned, sometimes retyped—on psychedelic rock, hip-hop and dance.

Reaching further back into the '80s is an Irish transvestite (at least that's what the profile says) named Brian, whose Smash Hits Archives (likepunkneverhappened.blogspot.com) uploads an issue of the U.K. pop biweekly *Smash Hits* on the 30th anniversary of each issue's first appearance.

Americans who want to relive their halcyon years issue by issue are in luck, too, thanks to Google Books (books.google.com), which has recently added archives of two '90s touchstones: *Spin* (May 1985 to October 2009) and *CMJ New Music Monthly* (December 1994 to June 2008). Chances are you remember the former's coverage of alt-rock's high season, though the real treasures are in John Leland's late-'80s "Singles" columns, including his priceless Vitamin Z dis: "How dare they call this wet rag 'Burning Flame'?" The *CMJ* issues don't come with their original giveaway CDs—though if you look hard enough, you can probably find those online, too.

MICHAELANGELO MATOS


JOHN PRINE
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JOHN PRINE
IN PERSON & ON STAGE

THE ART OF MOVING
PHILADELPHIA COMPANY KEEPS MUSICIANS AFLOAT

Mambo Movers is headquartered in a South Philly neighborhood that lacks a catchy name and an eco-friendly coffee shop. Yet these digs are a step up: This moving company, staffed entirely by artists, was founded 20-some years ago with an old mail truck and a few friends from the Philly punk scene. "It didn't start with the idea for a moving company of artists or musicians...they were the people I already knew, they had schedules I could work with," company founder Todd Kimmell told me over breakfast at a local diner. Mambo has since grown into a community staple, the only moving company you'll ever hear people recommend at a bar.

When I arrived at the office, co-owner Pete Danz noted which porters created the various works of art that crowded the space. "We have painters, photographers, writers and philosophers," he said, "but mostly musicians." His other business half, Serge Krupnov, corrected me when I asked why he thinks the guys choose to work as movers: "Nobody is a mover. Everybody is an artist that does moving to support their artistic life."

The day I visited, Jay Purdy (of The Extraordinaires), Mark Skierski (a member of An American Chinese) and Damien Taylor (who plays with The Sounds of Kaleidoscope) worked a 14-hour shift and had energy to spare. "I don't feel like we're so much employees of this company," Skierski said. "It's more like we're friends that happen to work with each other."

As the night came to an end, Purdy answered the question I'd been waiting to ask: why people pick Mambo Movers to haul their stuff. "I get this kind of *Ghostbusters* feeling," he said. "You'll be driving down the street and people will yell, 'Hey Mambo!' People know we're the starving artists that are also movers, and I think they find that interesting, but they're also kind of rooting us on." **JEFF GONICK**

Photo by Chris Sembrot

ROCK SAVIORS OF THE MOMENT

THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM

Photo by Nigel Crane

More than it even knows, this country needs its next great rock band. We live in a complicated age. We've got tea parties and bailouts and shutdowns and politicized street howlers of all persuasions shrieking from our thousand-channel satellite descramblers. We have no common chant to anchor our dreams or uphold a cherished myth. We've got mixtapes and sequins and nostalgia merchants and every manner of self-conscious polyrhythms, but we're short on raw fire and romantic longing. Too many curveballs, too few Hail Marys.

Enter The Gaslight Anthem. Could they be The Ones? Hell, their name has the word "anthem" in it. They are unafraid. There is absolutely no fucking sleight-of-hand with this band. They don't just sound like Springsteen; they flat-out quote his lyrics. They sketch charcoal drawings of hard-luck girls and guys who yearn themselves bloody. They sing about classic cars and sailor tattoos and outlaw cowboy bands. They're not topical. They're universal. They awake our inner teenager who retreated in us too quickly.

Their 2008 breakthrough *The '59 Sound* was the most refreshing album in years simply by being a set of great rock songs clumsy and modest enough to aim no higher. Their latest, *American Slang*, polishes the story while staying true to its core. The band slays in concert—all tats, crew-cuts and shouted choruses. They're the perfect marriage of punk and the bombastic Americana that punk claimed to hate before it fell back in love.

The Gaslight Anthem may not be the final answer to any bigger question, but they send you out into the night with your heart slamming and your fingers rapping the steering wheel and plenty of gas in the tank. **JEFF LEVEN**

CANADA'S ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN
PLAN D'ACTION ÉCONOMIQUE DU CANADA
Canada
TO ANOTHER PLACE...
31st Annual
CALGARY FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL
A genre-bending program featuring roots, world and indie artists from around the globe in hundreds of concerts and collaborations on 7 stages in a beautiful urban park in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, July 22- 25, 2010. Make 'one of the seven musical wonders of the world'* the soundtrack of your summer.
*The Globe and Mail 2006
www.calgaryfolkfest.com

Photo by Marcel Hartmann

JOHN C. REILLY
MAKES IT UP AS HE GOES

After two decades spent watching his name climb to the top of the marquee, actor John C. Reilly no longer worries about being sought-after by studios—he does the seeking himself. Since starring opposite Will Ferrell in the $100 million-grossing *Step Brothers* two years ago, Reilly has been tracking down his favorite lesser-known directors instead of waiting around for the next blockbuster.

After hearing his wife, producer Alison Dickey, rave about Mark and Jay Duplass, Reilly watched their debut feature, *The Puffy Chair*. He loved it, and asked her to send word to the brothers that he was interested in working with them. "They took it to heart and wrote the script with me in mind," Reilly, 45, says of the brothers' new film *Cyrus*. "We met, and they said, "We wrote this character for you, and we hope you want to do it, because, if you don't want to do it, we're going to do another movie. You're the only person we can see doing this.' I thought that was a really good sign. They wrote a great script, and then they allowed me to improvise my ass off, which is always cool."

Luminaries of the mumblecore movement (which often employs script outlines instead of predetermined dialogue), the Duplass Brothers would rarely direct *Cyrus*' cast as a group, leading to plenty of surprises on set. Reilly and his costars Marisa Tomei and Jonah Hill comprise something of a love triangle involving a mother, her suitor and her adult son. In an early scene, when Hill's character is politely getting to know his mom's new boyfriend, he tosses in an offhanded comment: "But seriously dude, don't fuck my mom."

"When he says that, you can even see the expression on my face," Reilly recalls. "That was the first take. They were running two cameras when we were doing that scene, so you see my reaction to that is totally genuine. Like, 'What did you just say?'"

Reilly studied improv at The Theatre School at DePaul University in his native Chicago, and has put those skills to use throughout his career. "I improvised whole scenes in *Boogie Nights* and *Hard Eight* and *Magnolia*. A lot of the character was based on improvisations I had done on video with Paul Thomas Anderson. *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* had whole improvised scenes. *Talladega Nights* and *Step Brothers*, certainly there's a lot of improv in those. It's just something I've always loved to do. It's tough to improv for a movie you don't believe in or don't think is good. So, ironically, it always takes a really good script to begin with, to be inspired to improv something on top of it."

Reilly is also a big admirer of filmmaker Lynne Ramsay, who until recently hadn't directed a feature film since 2002. "Ever since I saw *Morvern Callar*, I've been waiting for her next thing to come out," Reilly says. "Finally, I said to my agent at the time, 'Can you please find out what Lynne Ramsay is doing? She's a Scottish director.' And he was like, 'Who?'" But within a week, he'd discovered that she was working on an adaptation of the Lionel Shriver novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, and that she was a fan of John C. Reilly's work. Ramsay cast him opposite Tilda Swinton as the husband of a teenager who goes on a high-school shooting spree. Reilly just wrapped filming for it, and calls it a "gut-punch of a movie."

These days, his career is all about "staying relevant as an artist," he says, "working with people who are inspired and inspire you. At this point, I'm not a kid anymore. I've done almost 50 movies. I'm not showing up for the day's work unless it's something really special in one way or another. It's a little too late to just start doing it for the money. I've got a lot of great movies behind me. The burden is on me to keep trying to push the envelope, to stay involved with people who are as cool as the people I've been lucky enough to have worked with already." **JOSH JACKSON**

POPPIN' OFF IN HONOR OF SUMMER-MOVIE SEASON, A POPCORN CONSUMER GUIDE

BY BROOKE HATFIELD

1. CAPE COD POPCORN, WHITE CHEDDAR FLAVOR
These homogenous, powder-coated kernels resemble the head of Brain from *Pinky and the Brain.*
Ease of preparation: Caveman-stupid easy. Open the bag. Insert hand. Extract delicious popcorn.
How does the packaging make me feel? The drop-shadow on the photorealistic popcorn is menacing, but the lighthouse guides me through the storm of my own dread.
Eat while watching: *Cape Fear*

2. JIFFY POP, BUTTER-FLAVORED
The slogan for yummy old-school Jiffy Pop is "As much fun to make as it is to eat." I propose a change: "As fun to make as it is to hit the deck on your grandmother's kitchen floor because flaming-hot kernels are flying at your face."
Ease of preparation: The directions say the entire process should take two to five minutes, but my failure was complete by about minute three. First—and THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT—you must ensure that the aluminum-foil lid is fully connected to the edges of the pan. Then you heat a burner and shuffle the package until the kernels pop. If the foil is not in place during the shuffling process, you will singe your hands and melt your dreams, like Icarus himself.
How does the packaging make me feel? Intimidated.
Eat while watching: *Apocalypse Now*

3. TRADER JOE'S ORGANIC POPCORN WITH OLIVE OIL
Oh Trader Joe's, I want to dislike you because you unnecessarily package simple produce like garlic in plastic bags, but your snacks—like Chocolate Mochi and wasabi peas—are usually so tasty! So why does this taste like Styrofoam?
Ease of preparation: The hardest part is wading through the Trader Joe's parking lot.
How does the packaging make me feel? An art-nouveau nature theme is woven throughout the packaging's aesthetic. This makes me feel bored. So did the popcorn!
Eat while watching: *The English Patient*

4. ORVILLE REDENBACHER'S KETTLE KORN
Like the Rebel Alliance fighting the Empire, sweet and savory do battle in my mouth. After eating a couple of handfuls, I noticed a film on my hands—and I don't mean I was holding a DVD.
Ease of preparation: Moderate. Pop for two minutes.
How does the packaging make me feel? Orville Redenbacher looks like the lovechild of Don Knotts, Jimmy Carter and Dame Edna. So, aroused.
Eat while watching: *The Empire Strikes Back*

5. POP SECRET MOVIE THEATER BUTTER POPCORN
Easily the best traditional popcorn of the bunch, with a consistent and shockingly Technicolor butter coating.
Ease of preparation: Only a couple of minutes in the microwave, allowing plenty of time to ponder your own mortality.
How does the packaging make me feel? Stressed. The orange butter evokes BP's massive oil spill by way of the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards.
Eat while watching: *The Wizard of Oz*

NEWMAN'S OWN ORGANICS POP'S CORN
(Not Pictured.) This popcorn is perfect for snackers who don't like it drizzled in oil and seasonings. These people hate flavor and I don't understand them.
Ease of preparation: Moderate. It's supposed to take one to four minutes to pop, a dubiously wide range of time. I don't trust this popcorn.
How does the packaging make me feel? Sad that Paul Newman is dead. Almost sad enough that I salt the popcorn with my own tears.
Eat while watching: *Cool Hand Luke*

CROSSOVER REPEAL

SIX ILL-ADVISED ATTEMPTS AT GENRE JUMPING

True artists often feel a need to stretch their creative powers beyond the comprehension of that pesky entity known as "the audience." Sometimes this works. Sometimes Bob Dylan plugs in and everything turns out alright. Sometimes Miles Davis invents fusion, opening new musical horizons. Then again, sometimes Kid Rock sings. Sometimes "Macho Man" Randy Savage records himself rapping. And sometimes an opera singer makes an indie-rock covers album. **JEFF VRABEL**

	THE BIG IDEA	EGREGIOUS MOMENT	WHY THEY WENT THERE	VERDICT
RENÉE FLEMING, *DARK HOPE* (2010)	Opera soprano gets hip, sings Muse, Arcade Fire, The Mars Volta, Band of Horses and more—including an obscure and never-before-covered Leonard Cohen song called "Hallelujah."	Fleming sands much of the bombast off of "Intervention," and returns to the well of "In Your Eyes."	A lot of young people don't buy opera records.	Shouldn't upset anyone at the bookstore too much.
WILLIE NELSON, *COUNTRYMAN* (2005)	The red-headed stranger goes green on an album of reggae ("Sitting In Limbo," "The Harder They Come"), complete with cover art that makes us long for Cypress Hill's thoughtful subtlety.	On tracks like "Limbo" and "How Long Is Forever," Nelson and his tropical rhythms sound like they're on totally different islands.	In 2004, Nelson appeared on Toots and the Maytals's guest-packed *True Love*, and before that he smoked a bunch of weed.	Who are we to tell Willie what he can't do?
DARIUS RUCKER, *LEARN TO LIVE* (2008)	Between Rucker and Cowboy Troy, the 2000s were the best decade *ever* for black country singers. With *Learn To Live*, Rucker rode this tidal wave of diversity all the way to a platinum album. Go Hootie!	No country cliché goes unspoken: There's a new-baby greeting card, tortured titular cleverness ("Don't Think I Don't Think About It") and, of course, "Drinkin' and Dialin'."	Every Hootie & The Blowfish song featured beer and whining; this record was an opportunity to add Freedom.	Not remotely as bad as Bon Jovi's shameful 2007 country detour *Lost Highway*. Or *Fairweather Johnson*.
LIL WAYNE, *REBIRTH* (2009, OR, WAIT, 2010)	Weezy spent a year postponing this universally panned rap-rock opus. Then someone at Amazon leaked it, thus eliminating whatever slim chance it had of selling a single copy.	Throughout, he sounds disengaged and not like a crazy person, which is disappointing.	It's 2010! Who *isn't* doing rap-rock these days?	We had already come to a decision on nü-metal, fella. If it'll help you remember, we'll tattoo it on your back.
DURAN DURAN, *THANK YOU* (1995)	An album designed to shed much-needed insight on how Public Enemy informed "Ordinary World."	"Hello, Grandmaster Flash? It's Simon Le Bon. Yes, that was real lion makeup. Listen, we're remaking 'White Lines.' You would? Great! See you Tuesday."	They heard whispers that hastily assembled covers records can capitalize on a fleeting resurgence of interest.	From the nation's comedy writers, no, thank *you*.
NEIL YOUNG, *TRANS* (1982)	Legendary folkie abandons fans, legacy and good taste by recording with vocoder, synthesizer, electronic Kenner AT-AT and Coleco Vision, sounding like Afrika Bambaataa meets Peter Frampton.	The whole thing's a joke, but how pissed must Young have been when "Mr. Roboto" became a huge deal?	Sore at his label, Young handed over this vocoder-and-synth terror, then followed it up with the rockabilly album *Everybody's Rockin'*. Needless to say, Geffen sued him.	Do you have any idea how weird it feels to side with a litigious record company?

DAVID CROSS MY FIRST...

He's portrayed Allen Ginsberg and an analrapist. His voice has been featured in blockbuster video games (Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto) and movies (Kung Fu Panda, Alvin and the Chipmunks). He co-founded legendary sketch series Mr. Show and has toured his stand-up comedy around the world. In light of his myriad experiences, not to mention his new comedy album, Bigger and Blackerer (Sub Pop), it only seems fitting to ask for a few of the funnyman's firsts. So that's what we did. **AUSTIN L. RAY**

THE FIRST JOKE HE EVER TOLD: "When I was about eight or nine I came up with this little gem: 'When a baby boy is born how can you tell if it's Jewish? If he's got matzo balls.'"

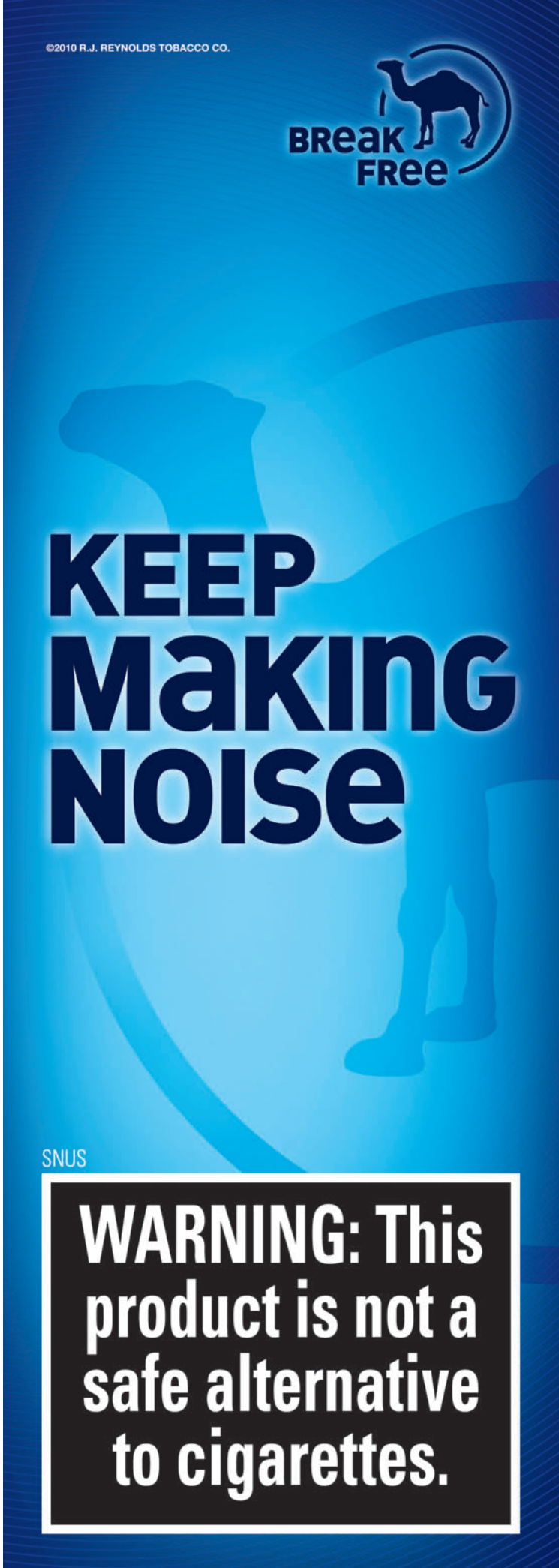
THE FIRST TIME HE GOT ANGRY: "I don't know, really. Probably when I was in the womb and my mom switched from Benson & Hedges regular to the ultra lights."

THE FIRST TIME HE WAS RECOGNIZED ON THE STREET: "It was at the first Bumbershoot Festival (in Seattle) that I did. This would have been fall of 1995 or maybe 1996. I had no idea of the popularity of *Mr. Show* outside of my handful of friends. Everywhere I went kids would tell me how much they loved it. Only four shows had aired at that time, too. I was blown away. I called Bob immediately to tell him. Then I accepted what would be the first of several thousand free joints."

HIS FIRST ACTING EXPERIENCE "I was the 'Narrator' for some kindergarten production of *The Musicians of Bremen*. It was some fairytale about animals that played instruments and did...something. I don't remember. I think they formed their own Masonic Temple maybe? I don't know, but I do know that for weeks afterwards I walked around proudly proclaiming that I planned on being a professional narrator when I grew up. Adorable, no?"

HIS FIRST DRUNKEN EXPERIENCE "I remember getting tipsy at some small party that my folks were having in New York. I was a Knicks fan back then, and I remember telling every adult about Earl 'The Pearl' Monroe and Dave DeBusschere and trying to spin a basketball on my tiny drunken Jewish finger. I later threw up."

THE FIRST TRULY POOR DECISION THAT HE MADE: "Well this is more about financial ignorance then morals or anything, but I traded a shitload—a ton!—of baseball cards I had to some much older kid for something stupid like a box of gum or something. My dad had told me never to trade the cards because of their value in later years, but when you're six being a teenager feels at least two lifetimes away. Also, when I was about 17 I saved a dollar by not buying the original single of 'Radio Free Europe' by R.E.M., deciding to tape it off of my friend instead. That thing is worth like $500 now."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Break Free
KEEP Making NOISE
SNUS
WARNING: This product is not a safe alternative to cigarettes.

THE WHITE HOUSE

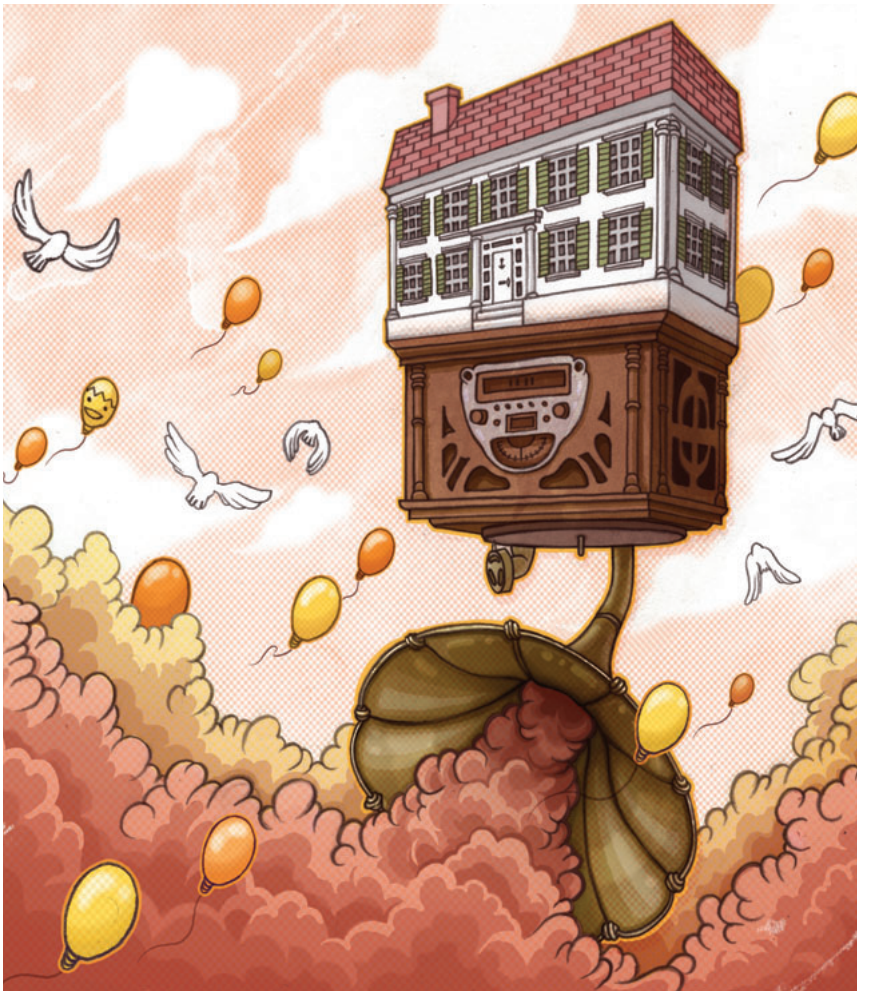
BY MICHAELANGELO MATOS ILLUSTRATION BY YUTA ONODA

One byproduct of having a teenage mother is that I got to know a generation I might not have otherwise. It's rare to have great-grandparents alive into your 20s, but I did with my grandmother's father, Jerry White. Jerry was part of a large (and, no coincidence, Irish Catholic) brood, the oldest and youngest of whom, Loretta (born 1901) and Arlene (born 1919), lived together in their two-story family home, painted white, from the early 1920s until their deaths. My mother's generation was also large: six brothers and sisters. Most of them spent weekends at the White House as kids, and into the mid 1990s—from ages five to 19—so did I.

Going to Loretta and Arlene's had a number of advantages over our cramped Section 8 apartment, beginning with location—the city was always cooler than the suburbs, even when I was six. They had a microwave in which to make nachos; an endless supply of Kemps Premium Peppermint Bon Bon ice cream; a big color TV (my mother and I subsisted for years on a 12-inch black-and-white); and a second floor where Loretta and Arlene both slept. I crashed in the middle room between theirs, and when they went to bed I'd make my move. I'm a born night owl, and being over there meant staying up as late as possible, watching movies on TV (two burned into memory, in very different ways, are the 1952 Doris Day musical *April in Paris* and the 1981 sexploitation *Lunch Wagon*) and, more importantly, listening to the radio.

The radio was on pretty much all the time over there—AM news and talk. There was one in every room, and both women—and soon enough, I—would have it not just in the bedroom at night, but in bed, under the pillow, usually tuned to Larry King's all-night talk show. Occasionally I would sleep in Arlene's room, on the floor, because her radio got better reception than mine.

Of course, I also listened to pop radio. At the big dining room table, I'd write or draw while listening to a small transistor. At about eight years old, I got ambitious and began a list of every single song ever written, a number I was certain would reach, God, like 500 maybe. (I think I got to about 70 before going to bed.) My interest in music eventually waned in favor of comics and, appropriately enough, old-time radio. But when it came back in full after I discovered the Beatles at age 12, my family indulged me as long as I listened quietly. I tried, not always successfully, to appease them.



Occasionally I would sleep in Arlene's room, on the floor, because her radio got better reception than mine.

Two radio memories stand out above all others, and both involve the same station, KJJO (104.1 FM), an early adopter of modern rock. In 1991, we had a blizzard, which is routine for Minneapolis in winter, and one DJ was stuck on-air for two extra shifts. She played through damn near everything except the one song I kept calling to request: Soho's "Hippychick." I badgered her every couple of hours until she finally gave in.

The other was almost opposite: I read a piece in *City Pages*, the local weekly, about this great new band playing the 7th Street Entry that night. They were called Nirvana. Writer Terri Sutton described their song "Smells Like Teen Spirit" in such hushed, reverential tones that I felt hopeless: I wasn't at the show, and wasn't likely to get in anyway. I closed the paper and marched to the radio, hoping to hear something equivalent to the fireworks Sutton had described. Within two minutes I heard a riff and a drumbeat, and immediately knew it was the same band. "For Christ's sake," Arlene yelled from the other room, "will you turn that shit down?"

↪ MICHAELANGELO MATOS IS A MUSIC COLUMNIST FOR *THE STRANGER* AND *THE ONION*'S A.V. CLUB. HE LIVES IN BROOKLYN.

PASTE AT SXSW!

OUR BEST SXSW YET? WE THINK SO. OVER FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS, *PASTE* PRESENTED FOUR INCREDIBLE LINEUPS OF MUSIC IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR FRIENDS AT BAY AREA TONE, IZZE, PUREVOLUME.COM, SIERRA NEVADA, 5 HOUR ENERGY, TO WRITE LOVE ON HER ARMS, LIMELIGHT, UV VODKA AND VANGUARD RECORDS. FEATURED ACTS INCLUDED JAKOB DYLAN & THREE LEGS, FRIGHTENED RABBIT, FREELANCE WHALES, LOU BARLOW & THE MISSINGMEN, JOHNNY FLYNN, EISLEY, CAROLINA CHOCOLATE DROPS, SHEARWATER AND 27 OTHERS. FIND TONS OF VIDEO FROM THE FESTIVITIES AT PASTEMAGAZINE.COM/SXSW2010. **PHOTOS BY RACHEL BAILEY AND SADIE ATES**

Lissie

Decemberists side project Black Prairie

Johnny Flynn

Free Energy

Jakob Dylan & Neko Case

PURE VOLUME HOUSE 2010
Vangard RECORDS
limelight A service of RightsFlow
IZZE SPARKLING JUICE You'll Love What's Inside.
BAY AREA TONE MOBILE RECORDING
5-hour ENERGY
UV VODKA
SIERRA NEVADA
TO WRITE LOVE ON HER ARMS.
BUSTEDTEES

ROCK GLASS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH MEISTER

JUST IN TIME FOR SUMMER, ACE MIXOLOGIST GREG BEST AND HIS CREW AT ATLANTA GASTROPUB **HOLEMAN + FINCH** WHIP US UP SOME MUSIC-INSPIRED LIBATIONS.

1. LA SEXORCISTO

1 & ½ oz. cachaça + 2 dashes Amargo Chuncho (bitters) + 3-4 oz. ginger beer + 1 mint sprig POUR ALL INGREDIENTS OVER ICE IN A COCKTAIL GLASS. GARNISH WITH THE MINT SPRIG.

2. THE HORSE WITH NO NAME

½ oz. fresh lemon juice + ½ oz. peach liqueur + ½ oz. sweet vermouth + 1 oz. bourbon or rye + 2 dashes Angostura bitters + 1 raw sugar cube + Sparkling rosé wine IN THE BOTTOM OF A CHAMPAGNE FLUTE, PLACE THE RAW SUGAR CUBE AND DOUSE IT WITH THE BITTERS. IN AN ICE-FILLED COCKTAIL SHAKER, ADD ALL SPIRITS AND LEMON JUICE AND SHAKE VIGOROUSLY. STRAIN INTO THE FLUTE OVER THE BITTERS-SOAKED SUGAR, AND TOP WITH SPARKLING WINE.

3. THE FAMILY TRADITION
¼ oz. sorghum syrup + 1 oz. VS cognac + 1 oz. small batch bourbon + 1 bar-spoon of Becherovka + 3 dashes Angostura bitters + 3 dashes Peychaud's bitters + 1 disc of lemon peel STIR ALL INGREDIENTS WITH ICE IN A SHAKER. POUR INTO ROCKS GLASS. SQUEEZE LEMON PEEL, SKIN SIDE DOWN, OVER THE TOP OF THE DRINK AND DISCARD.

4. CANNIBAL CORPSE REVIVER
1 oz. fresh lime juice + 1 oz. Aquavit + 1 oz. aged Haitian rum + 1 oz. Drambuie + Jellied Peychaud's bitters SHAKE ALL INGREDIENTS WITH ICE AND STRAIN INTO A CHILLED JUICE GLASS. FLOAT BITTERS JELLIES. IF UNABLE TO FIND JELLY BITTERS, FLOAT A FEW DROPS OF PEYCHAUD'S ON THE SURFACE OF THE DRINK.

5. WATERLOO SUNSET
¼ oz. fresh blood orange juice + ¼ oz. fresh orange juice + 1 & ½ oz. London dry gin + ½ oz. Aperol + ¼ oz. Cointreau or Triple Sec + 2 dashes of orange bitters SHAKE ALL INGREDIENTS WITH ICE AND STRAIN INTO TULIP GLASS. GARNISH WITH A THIN SLICE OF BLOOD ORANGE.

BAND

SLEIGH BELLS SING A CHORUS OR TWO

The first 23 seconds of Sleigh Bells' "Crown On the Ground" are beset by violent guitar squeals and lusty "ahhs"; then comes 22 seconds of brutally abrasive noise rounded out by three minutes of slick, sweet vocals, loud chants, foot-stomping percussion and a hundred other glorious things. It might be the best pop song of 2009—maybe 2010, too.

Last fall, this Brooklyn duo's handful of demos and slightly-larger handful of CMJ Music Marathon shows got the music world talking, and for good reason. Alexis Krauss and Derek Miller have expertly wedded screeching low-end distortion (Miller was in the hardcore band Poison the Well) to sweet pop vocals (in her youth, Krauss was in a manufactured teen-pop group called RubyBlue). They sound like My Bloody Valentine covering LL Cool J. And now, on the heels of their debut LP *Treats*, the world is reckoning with their fierceness.

"The sound was not and is not an aesthetic choice but a lack of resources which sometimes works to your advantage," Miller told *Paste* via e-mail. Some artists might not consider any kind of *lack* as a good thing, but Sleigh Bells have done a lot with very little. Though the new album has a cameo from a horn section ("heavily processed," Miller notes), "we are going to remain a two-piece," he says. "It makes more sense financially, and we like keeping it simple." **MARK KROTOV**

SLEIGH BELLS

HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, N.Y.
ALBUM: *Treats*
BAND MEMBERS: Alexis Krauss (vocals), Derek Miller (guitar)
FOR FANS OF: The Pipettes, Funkadelic, Swizz Beatz

Photo by Aaron Richter

Photo by Patrick Lelli

BREATHE OWL BREATHE TAKES IT EASY

Until she turned 18, Andréa Moreno-Beals' life revolved around classical cello—private lessons, hours of practice. But in 2004, six weeks into her studies at Oberlin College, she met Micah Middaugh at a Dairy Queen in Northern Michigan and decided their chance meeting was more inspiring than a life spent reading sheet music. So she dropped out, sequestering herself with Middaugh and now-bandmate Trevor Hobbs in what they call "magic central," the small log cabin in the Michigan woods where they live and play.

There, by the heat of a wood stove, they became Breathe Owl Breathe and honed their sound—a wild rumpus of harmony and rhythm—and named their debut after its birthplace. While some peers have reveled in reinvigorating the old, weird side of Americana, the band's flare for pop-addled melodies flips the contemporary folk aesthetic, eschewing freakiness in favor of charm. It's a dynamic built on coupling clever arrangements with lyrical whimsy.

On *Magic Central,* shadows tint the sunshine, a frailty that plays out with oblique narratives and ghostly vocals. "We kind of like the haunted vibe with the fun playhouse vibe," Micah explains. "[...] A lot of people just notice the fun part and I think a lot of it comes from that darker place where things can go." **ASHLEY MELZER**

BREATHE OWL BREATHE

HOMETOWN: East Jordan, Mich.
ALBUM: *Magic Central*
BAND MEMBERS:
Micah Middaugh (guitar, vocals), Andréa Moreno-Beals (cello, vocals), Trevor Hobbs (percussion, keys, vocals)
FOR FANS OF: Bowerbirds, Smog, Shel Silverstein

SUCKERS CHURN IT OUT

Between their 2009 self-titled EP and upcoming full-length debut *Wild Smile*, Brooklyn's Suckers officially have released fewer than 20 songs. But the band has a wealth of material nobody has heard yet: They write about one song per practice and record almost everything as they go. "If we went through that digital recorder and went back throughout our writing history," says multi-instrumentalist Quinn Walker, "I'd guess we have about 60 to 70 songs."

Walker is understandably happy to finally see the release of Suckers' first LP; it's long overdue for the band, who all met while growing up in Connecticut years ago. Cousins Walker and Austin Fisher grew up down the street from one another and started playing music together when they were seven years old. "We were fiddling around on keyboards and making bizarre children's music," Walker remembers. The four bandmates all moved to New York separately, then reconnected and started making the sweeping, anthemic pop music that graced their debut EP. The guys sing in chaotic harmony, each track features a variety of percussion and there's a myriad of synthesizers, horns and guitars; the melodic, layered composition makes it hard to tell who's doing what.

SUCKERS
HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, N.Y.
ALBUM: *Wild Smile*
MEMBERS: Quinn Walker, Austin Fisher, Pan, Brian Aiken (all multi-instrumentalists)
FOR FANS OF: Yeasayer, Dirty Projectors, TV On the Radio

And now, with a new album to promote, what does Walker want to do? "I'd like to be in the studio right now recording another album, to tell you the truth," he says, noting that he prefers studio recording to playing live. He'd like the band to release four albums a year instead of taking what he calls "the more tasteful approach." "There's definitely a certain energy and adrenaline rush playing live that you don't get being in the studio," Walker says. "But then there's also this maddening joy when you've created something from scratch. The creative process is my favorite part about playing music." **EVAN MINSKER**

Photo by Sam Fleischner

BELIEVE IN THE MAGIC KIDS

What is Magic Kids? Well, for starters:
"A television channel in Peru or something."
"A really low-budget daycare center in Memphis."
"A children's company that may or may not be a scam, according to Google."

These are a few things that Will McElroy and Bennett Foster, both members of the Memphis, Tenn. quintet, have learned share their band's name. Its actual origin is similarly non sequitur: "I had a funny movie poster that I bought like 10 years ago from a junk store for this movie called *Magic Kid*," McElroy says. "I've never seen the movie, but I thought the name sounded better than the other hundred names that we had thought up."

As their moniker suggests, Magic Kids make music that's both obsessively orchestrated and simplistically childlike, filled with strings, horns and sing-along harmonies. A spinoff of Memphis punk act The Barbaras, the group has a seven-inch record (the infectious "Hey Boy" with B-side "Good To Be") on venerable Memphis garage imprint Goner, and another seven-inch (a split with recent tourmates The Smith Westerns) out via Fat Possum. Fresh off their first proper tour with blog sensation Girls, you'll have to excuse the Kids if they seem a bit bewildered. "When we were doing The Barbaras, we were learning how to play our instruments," McElroy says. "We were just figuring things out. Pop music was still a novel concept to us."

MAGIC KIDS

HOMETOWN: Memphis, Tenn.
ALBUM: TBA
BAND MEMBERS: Bennett Foster (vocals, guitar), Will McElroy (keyboard), Ben Bauermeister (drums), Michael Peery (bass, vocals), Alex Gates (guitar vocals)
FOR FANS OF: The Beach Boys, Jens Lekman, Belle & Sebastian

In March, Magic Kids headed into the studio with engineer Shane Stoneback (Vampire Weekend, Britney Spears) to work on *Memphis*, their debut full-length for True Panther Sounds (the label behind Girls and Hunx and His Punx). The band is shooting for an August release. "We like to take our time," Foster says. "We really take it slow. We like to smell the flowers the whole way. We've never had to think of it as an obligation." **AUSTIN L. RAY**

f Photo by Alejandra Sabillon

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ZOE LISTER JONES
NEW ROMANTIC

Zoe Lister Jones was understandably hesitant to share intimate details of her love-life with movie-goers, but the 27-year-old actress/screenwriter's desire for truthful storytelling won out over propriety. The result was the SXSW breakout hit *Breaking Upwards*, a trenchant, semi-biographical film about a New York couple who make intricate plans to gradually ease out of monogamy and back into single-dom, co-written by and co-starring Lister Jones and her real-life beau, actor Daryl Wein.

The New York-bred Lister Jones has always favored a visceral approach to depicting the perils of big-city romance, beginning with *Codependence is a Four-Letter Word*, the one-woman play she wrote and starred in after graduating from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. It dealt with "the question of how to maintain one's independence in a monogamous relationship," she says. That's also a major theme of *Breaking Upwards* and an unanswerable quandary for the actress herself—which is why she was initially so nervous to share her own story.

"When Daryl proposed that we make this movie, it was simultaneous to us living the film's experiment," she says. "I was apprehensive, so I didn't sign on as co-writer until a year later, when the experiment ended." She then became possessed by the need to tell their story as a different kind of romantic comedy. "There isn't real representation of how people in relationships actually behave, particularly our generation," she says "[...] And there are so few female protagonists in romantic movies you'd actually want identify with."

Lister Jones and Wein are returning to that thematic well with *Lola Versus*, about a woman who chooses to re-enter the New York dating scene instead of settling down, against the protestations of her friends. (Lister Jones will also appear in this summer's *Salt* alongside Angelina Jolie, and the upcoming *All Good Things* with Ryan Gosling and Kristen Wiig.) "There's an archetype that's hard for studios to shake. Even when you have a female protagonist, she's still in the cookie-cutter mold of the 1950s housewife," she laughs. "They haven't progressed enough to be unglamorous, or really human and raw. I've broken down some of those barriers, in my own way. But we've got a long way to go." **MICHAEL SABA**

ZOE LISTER JONES
HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, N.Y.
MOVIE: *Breaking Upwards*
FOR FANS OF: Greta Gerwig, Kristen Wiig, Jason Schwartzman

Photo by Alex Bergman

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SAMBASSADEUR TURNS BACK TIME

Sambassadeur just wasn't made for these times. Then again, the Beach Boys' neglected 1970 gem *Sunflower*—one of guitarist and co-songwriter Joachim Läckberg's favorite albums—wasn't made for its time, either. This Swedish quartet grafts European grandeur to the symphonic melodies of post-surfing Brian Wilson for a sound as hooky and hypnotic as sunshine pop, minus the sugar. Call it partly-cloudy pop—it's a sound that Sambassadeur has been crafting for years.

The band's third album, *European* (their first to receive extensive distribution outside their home continent) is also their most ambitious. Many of the album's tracks are swathed in strings, the arrangements crafted on an old Roland synthesizer and then recorded quickly by 17 hired musicians, the vintage feel captured by producer Mattias Glavas. Contrasting the sweetness, Anna Persson's world-weary voice glides atop a bank of violins, cellos and heavenly hooks. "It's melancholy. It's sometimes Nico-like," Läckberg says. When it's suggested that Persson is a bit more tuneful than the late Velvet Underground vocalist, he adds, "Not as German."

There's even a touch of folk in "Forward is All" (with its melodic echoes of Leonard Cohen's "Coming Back to You") and "Albatross." "We always like an acoustic, airy feeling to the songs," Läckberg says. "One of my favorite songs is Glen Campbell's version of 'Both Sides Now.' That's the kind of arrangement we really like." **SHANE HARRISON**

Photo by Kjell B. Persson

SAMBASSADEUR

HOMETOWN: Gothenburg, Sweden
ALBUM: *European*
BAND MEMBERS: Joachim Läckberg (guitar), Daniel Permbo (guitar, drums), Anna Persson (vocals, guitar), Daniel Tolergård (bass)
FOR FANS OF: Jens Lekman, Belle & Sebastian, Serge Gainsbourg

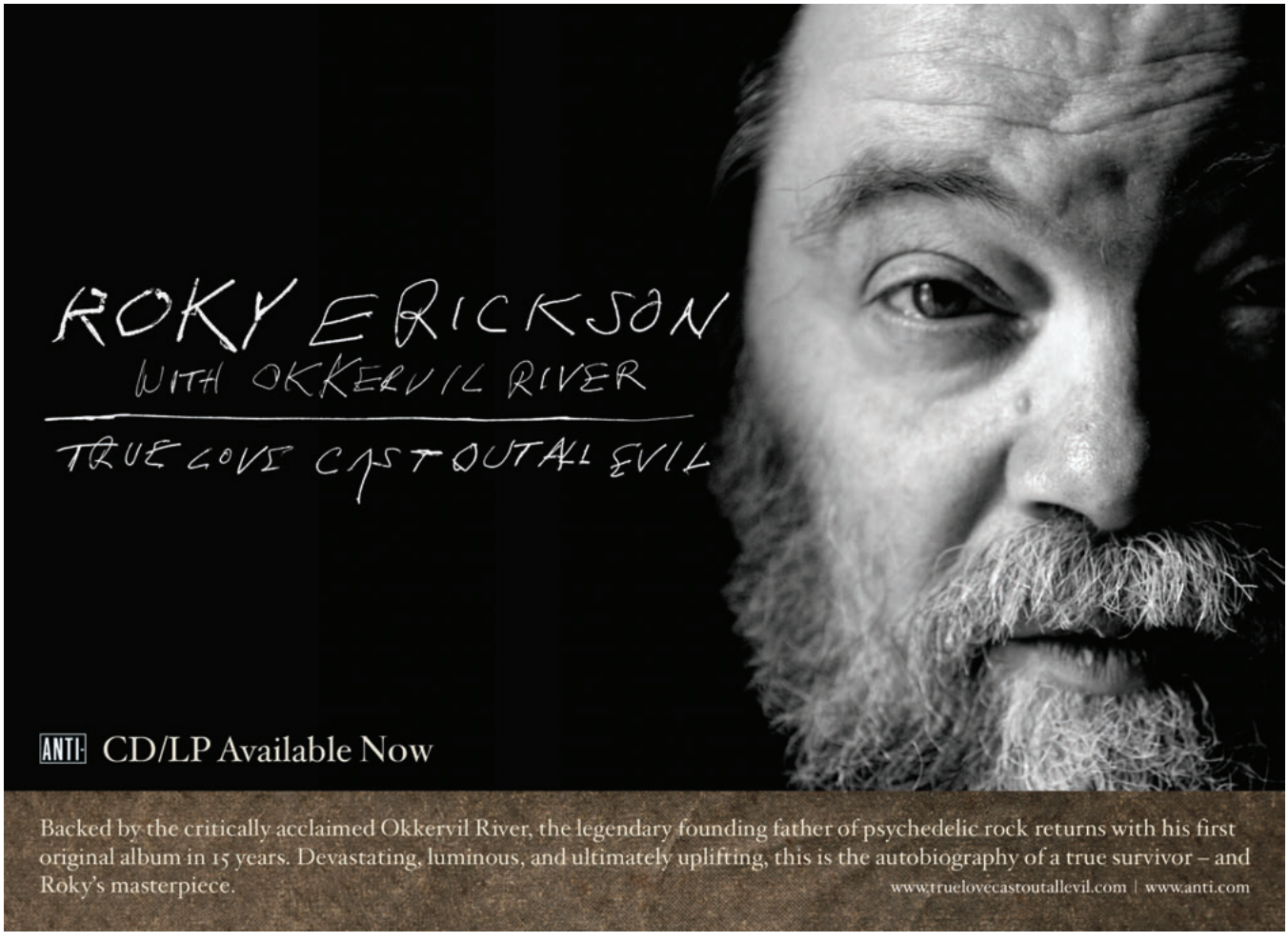
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Photo by Julie Roberts

FRONTIER RUCKUS GOES HOME AGAIN

Last year, the pensive folk-rock quintet Frontier Ruckus signed to North Carolina's Ramseur Records, recorded their second LP and all quit their day jobs to make music full time; in recent months, they've toured the U.S. and Europe. Some might consider this all to be "living the dream." But for Matthew Milia, it's more like a nightmare—literally. "We have a 15-passenger white utility van, which is like my nightmare from childhood of being robbed," the 24-year-old frontman admits, sitting in the vehicle outside of a cafe in Louisville, Ky. while the rest of the band eats breakfast. "The robbers would pull into the driveway with *that van*."

Today, Frontier Ruckus is on the way to Chicago for a night before heading back to Ann Arbor, Mich., where they got their start, for a big homecoming show. To say the band feels a deep connection to the state is like saying Milia's hometown of Detroit has turned out a few cars over the years. Their new album, *Deadmalls and Nightfalls*, is a sublimely melancholy catalog of ruminations on the city where he grew up, dreaming about white vans in the same house and attending the same school all the while. The songs evoke not just the shadow-slatted memories of a still-recent adolescence but also the ineffable sadness and beauty of time's effect on a place; in his wry warble, Milia mourns "the shuttered deadmall and the Sears / where my mother worked for years" and a "thick-carpet-world where the / street lamps explode in the spring," with banjo, singing saw and harmonica underpinning the shambling nostalgia.

The songs are all about Michigan, but that hasn't discouraged more far-flung fans; oddly, there's something about the specificity of Milia's memories that translates to a broader experience, or at least to pockets like Denton, Texas and Norman, Okla. "Those are some of our favorite places," he says, "where you're not really expecting much, but you show up and everyone's singing your songs." **RACHAEL MADDUX**

FRONTIER RUCKUS

HOMETOWN: - - 0 . 0 -
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ALBUM: *Deadmalls and Nightfalls*
BAND MEMBERS: 2 2 (
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ELEANOR CATTON
SOLID GOLD

AUTHOR

Photo by Victoria Birkinshaw

The Daily Mail hailed her as 2009's "golden girl of fiction," and author Joshua Ferris called her debut tome "a glimpse into the future of the novel itself." But Eleanor Catton prefers to keep such grandiose accolades at arms' length. "It's a bit frightening when people make a connection from the book to your actual personality," she says, "because all of a sudden you're visible in a way that you weren't before." She giggles, then adds, "Plus, I got teased a bit by my friends by that 'golden girl' thing."

ELEANOR CATTON
HOMETOWN: Canterbury, New Zealand
BOOK: *The Rehearsal*
FOR FANS OF: Jeanette Winterson, Vendela Vida, Deb Olin Unferth

The cause of all the fuss is *The Rehearsal*, which began as Catton's MFA thesis. It's a study of the dichotomy of performance and reality that dissolves the boundaries of both. When an alleged student-teacher affair at one high school becomes the material for a play at another, notions of authenticity and exhibition become irrevocably entangled.

In stark contrast to Catton's affable conversational style, her prose has an intricate, nearly mathematical feel—she meticulously arranges her words into cadenced measures lending each sentence a musical rhythm. As the book's cast of adolescents contend with their own performances, both real and imagined, Catton gives them voices that dip and dive, rising into crescendos and shattering the fragile notions of their speakers. Through her precise manipulation of truth and perception, she dismantles the mold of fiction.

"There are two layers of reality operating at once," Catton explains. "You're seeing both the performance of the event, as well as the event as it's happening. Then, you start to realize that this duality isn't as stable as you might think."

GRAY CHAPMAN

FILMMAKERS

Photo by Leah Singer

JOSH AND BENNY SAFDIE
TRUE LIES

The titular fumbling father of the film *Daddy Longlegs* emerges from deep within the collective memories of co-directors Josh and Benny Safdie. The brothers' first full-length feature collaboration (Josh also helmed *The Pleasure of Being Robbed* in 2008) follows two young boys on a rare, two-week visit with their father (Ronald Bronstein, director of cult indie-flick *Frownland*). The trip proceeds disastrously; at various points, the kids are whisked away, drugged and left alone on the streets of New York City. It's semi-autobiographical (and mostly a comedy), but unlike many other filmmakers working in such vaguely personal territory, Josh, 26, and Benny, 24, happily answer questions about their resemblance to the family in the film.

"The way it is autobiographical is emotional more than factual," Josh offers.

Benny is more blunt: "We're trying to give people the same feelings. In order to do that for an audience, we had to exaggerate and lie."

Josh again: "Like, well, we weren't actually drugged."

The brothers grew up in New York under the steady watch of their real dad's own camera ("we were a tool of constant introspection for him," Josh says) and have released short films under their Red Bucket banner since high school. *Daddy Longlegs* reflects those grass roots, evoking a whispery, home-movie intimacy that's aesthetically gentle and emotionally ragged. After its May 14 theatrical release, the Safdie brothers plan to continue work on a number of projects separately and together, possibly including some Hollywood studio work—though they aim to keep it low-key.

JOSH AND BENNY SAFDIE
HOMETOWN: Manhattan and Queens, N.Y.
MOVIE: *Daddy Longlegs*
FOR FANS OF: Hirokazu Kore-eda, Mike Leigh, Andrew Bujalski

"We've just finished making such a close, personal film with *Daddy Longlegs*," Josh says. "I definitely want to raise the scope of production, [but] I don't think that necessarily means bringing in 25 people to carry a coffee cup."

JEFFREY BLOOMER

TEHRAN CALLING

BAHMAN GHOBADI'S NEWEST FILM OFFERS A WINDOW INTO IRAN'S UNDERGROUND MUSIC SCENE, AND GIVES VOICE TO THE RISE OF AN INTERNET-FUELED ROCK 'N' ROLL REVOLUTION

BY MICHAEL SABA

"YOU'VE MADE IT BIG. I HEAR YOU WERE ON CABLE TV!"

A SILHOUETTED MAN WHISPERS IN FARSI. HE'S SITTING AT A BAY OF MIXING TABLES, LIGHT REFLECTING OFF HIS CIRCULAR EYEGLASSES. THE STUDIO'S ONLY ILLUMINATION IS A RECORDING ROOM BEHIND A DIRTY WINDOW WHERE A GROUP OF MUSICIANS ARE PERFORMING. "THEY TALKED ABOUT THE CONCERT. BLOOD DRINKING AND DEVIL WORSHIPPING..." HE SAYS, BEFORE THE SHAWL-CLAD WOMAN HE'S TALKING TO INTERRUPTS HIM. "THAT'S HOW THEY WORK. THEY TRY TO SMEAR MUSICIANS AND LOCK THEM UP."

This dialogue and setting is the stuff of dystopian fiction—a brutal totalitarian society where non-government-sanctioned music is outlawed, and rock rebellion brews in shadowy underground studios and warehouses. But it's only one of many staggeringly true-to-life exchanges in *No One Knows About Persian Cats*—a docu-drama chronicling the true story of Iranian indie rock band Take It Easy Hospital and its attempt to leave the country for Europe.

Since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, any kind of musical performance in the country (along with most other forms of art) requires the approval of the government's censorship bureau, the Ministry of Guidance. Western-style rock and female solo artists are outright banned. Musicians risk arrest and probable incarceration for rehearsing or performing without a permit. These musical taboos are part of a host of other prohibitions against public and private behavior and dress.

Persian Cats, released in April in a limited theatrical run and Video-On-Demand, won the Special Jury Prize at Cannes in 2009. The film was shot secretly in Tehran, Iran's capital, over the course of 18 days in 2007, a little less than two years before the so-called "Twitter Revolution" brought Iran's discontented youth to the world's attention.

In the film, a shaky handheld camera follows the two members of Take It Easy Hospital, Ashkan Koshanejad and Negar Shaghaghi, as they wait for the forged visas and passports that will make their escape from Iran possible. And as they wait, Koshanejad and Shaghaghi plumb the breadth and depth of Iran's burgeoning underground music scene. One character estimates there are more than 2,000 illegal bands in Tehran—searching for other acts to help them fulfill their lifelong ambition before they leave: playing a concert in their homeland. As they hopscotch from one makeshift studio or performance space to the next, *Persian Cats* takes a representative sample of Tehran's underground hip-hop acts, metal groups, garage-rock outfits and jazz pianists.

An unmistakable portrait of contemporary Iran emerges from this sparse narrative, and becomes the thrust of the film's plot: Smoldering beneath the surface of an Islamic fundamentalist state is a counterculture of rebellious, repressed Iranian youth.

Persian Cats was written and directed, illegally, by Bahman Ghobadi, the Kurdish-Iranian protégé and fellow-traveler of legendary Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami. Ghobadi served as production assistant on Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us*, the 1999 picture that cemented Kiarostami's worldwide status as a luminary of '90s cinema. It proved to be an instructive experience: Ghobadi released the internationally-acclaimed *A Time for Drunken Horses* the very next year, and became the foremost voice of Iranian cinema's New Wave movement.

But *Persian Cats* came about through happenstance, not design: "There was no initial planning that this movie was going to be about music," Ghobadi, 41, explains through a translator, during a phone call from Iraq. He's currently somewhere between Baghdad and Kurdistan—for security reasons he won't divulge his exact location. "I was trying to get a permit for a different movie I wanted to make, and I had already been delayed for two years. This movie is a direct result of those frustrations I felt during the creative process."

Ghobadi never got the permit. During a conversation with a friend, he realized that musicians and filmmakers in Iran were dealing with the same censorship, and the same frustrations. "I ended up going to people's homemade studios," he says, "since I couldn't get government approval, which was how I became introduced to Tehran's underground music scene. It had such a big impact, I realized I had to make *Persian Cats*."

That's an attitude shared by Roxana Saberi, 32, the Iranian-American journalist who co-wrote *Persian Cats*. She met the director in 2007 in Tehran, where Ghobadi told her about the project, and Saberi immediately agreed to help write the script and select the bands that would be featured in the film. "The movie shows aspects of Iranian society that many outsiders are unaware of," she says, "and that many Iranians realize exist, but know the authorities do not want to be expressed publicly."

For Saberi, the film's themes of repression have a personal edge: She was arrested in Iran in 2009 on dubious charges

Photos courtesy of MJFilm

of espionage, and spent three months in an Iranian prison before the charges were overturned. "*Persian Cats* portrays some of the discontent that many Iranians, especially many of the country's large youth population, have felt because of the state-imposed limitations they face."

Yet the film's representation of those authoritarian forces doesn't arrive until it's final minutes, when police lights reflect off of Shaghaghi's face and a wail of sirens presages the hasty break-up of an underground show. There are no jackboots, riot shields, tear gas, or any of the other imagery that came to define Iran's government during the post-election uprisings of 2009. Ghobadi prefers this subtle approach to his critique of the current regime, for very specific reasons: "I don't want to personify the problem in an individual character," he says. "It's a system. And not just a governmental or legal system, it's cultural too. Certain aspects of the culture are tyrannical in their domination of the youth, and the youth are ready to rebel."

You're not worried about getting busted?" Shaghaghi asks a lanky, bearded man shouldering a six-string in a dimly-lit, brick-walled practice space. "Why worry?" he quips as he grips the fretboard. "We're doing nothing wrong, just making music. We're hurting no-one." "Get busted, and you'll go to jail for at least six months," she says, shaking her head.

Persian Cats' companion soundtrack of the same name was the best-selling album on iTunes in France earlier this year. The Internet is quickly proving to be the most effective vehicle for cultural exchange between Iran's booming underground music scene and the rest of the world. So says Obaash (no last name given), frontman of the Iranian post-punk group The Yellow Dogs, via phone from Brooklyn. The Yellow Dogs feature prominently in *Persian Cats*; their burbling, snappy track "New Century" scores a scene where Koshanejad and Shaghaghi visit the group's makeshift performing and recording space, in between quick-cuts of day-to-day life in Tehran.

The Yellow Dogs sprang from clandestine meetings in a friend's basement, decorated in the style of a New York City dive bar, complete with soundproofed walls and a secret entrance. And for the three years bandmates played in Iran, they rehearsed on the roof of their drummer's apartment, overlooking "the most beautiful view of Tehran you'll ever see," Obaash says, his voice brimming with enthusiasm. But in late 2009, when his neighbors called the morality police—the government military group responsible for enforcing proper Islamic behavior and dress, particularly among women—the musicians decided to pack their bags for the U.S., settling weeks later in New York.

"In order to get this music, we have to download it from the Internet," Obaash says. "The Internet is the best thing that has happened to Iran in many years, especially for music, because there are no record stores or rock cafés. It was the only place we could go to distribute our music, and talk about our band. And it was the only way other people around the world could find out about us."

"Young people in Iran go home, sit down at the computer, and check their Facebook, read news, listen to music, watch new and avant-garde movies," he says. "It's helping our culture so much. The government, the older generation, doesn't really support culture, but people can get almost anything with the Internet."

Which is exactly why Koshanejad agreed to star in *Persian Cats* as a faux-documentary version of himself: "There's a minority community in Tehran who have chosen to change young people's routine, and put on shows and art," he says from his central London apartment. "We chose to be a part of that community. But we had to stay underground to play our music. I was a very invisible person in my own country, just for playing music."

In Iran, the Internet has become largely synonymous with the country's underground music scene. "MySpace saved our lives," he deadpans, offering a quick laugh before assuming a deadly serious tone. "There are not many things for young people to do in Iran, so the only thing that connects you to other people is the Internet, and that definitely separates them from the older generation." He pauses, considering his words. "That's exactly why Twitter was so important to the uprisings after last year's election."

Koshanejad is no stranger to Iran's hard-line stance on the arts. Weaned on bootlegged black-market Nirvana and Radiohead albums in the '90s, he taught himself to play a wide variety of instruments before joining the underground group FONT in 2004. As in the plot of *Persian Cats*, he was arrested in 2007 and imprisoned for 21 days for playing a concert. "Honestly," he laughs, "it only convinced me I was doing the right thing."

"THE IRANIAN PEOPLE ARE CHANGING BECAUSE GENERATIONS CHANGE, AND NO ONE CAN STOP THAT CHANGE," HE SAYS. "I CAN'T PREDICT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TOMORROW, OR EVEN NEXT YEAR. THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE IN POWER FOR SEVERAL YEARS MORE, BUT IT'S REALLY ONLY A MATTER OF TIME."

After being released from prison he met Shaghaghi. The two met Ghobadi in an underground studio in Tehran through mutual friends, and he was so fascinated by their story that he decided to make them the film's protagonists.

Though Koshanejad shares Ghobadi's frustrations with the Iranian government, he insists that his group's music isn't inherently political in nature: "We're more about social issues, human relations, peace," he says. "We don't do it to make a political statement; the opposite actually. We want to erase all the borders on the map, and just come together as housemates in the same home. The best equipment—the best tool for that—is our music.

"We don't want to only present ourselves as being representative of Iran. We're really just like everyone else, we're

all the same, and that's the exact message we want to bring. It doesn't matter what your language, your country is. This film shows people that whatever language you speak, whatever you might see in the world media about Iran, the actual people of Iran are just like us, and just like you. The younger generation in Iran is absolutely different." That zeitgeist shift was likely unavoidable: A large percentage of the country's adult men died in the Iran-Iraq war, and the '90s postwar population boom left present-day Iran with a population in which more than two-thirds of the country is under the age of 30.

Koshanejad personally sees Take It Easy Hospital's music as more of a statement on the shifting sensibilities of Iran's youth population than a political polemic: "The Iranian people are changing because generations change, and no one can stop that change," he says. "I can't predict what will happen tomorrow, or even next year. The current government might be in power for several years more, but it's really only a matter of time."

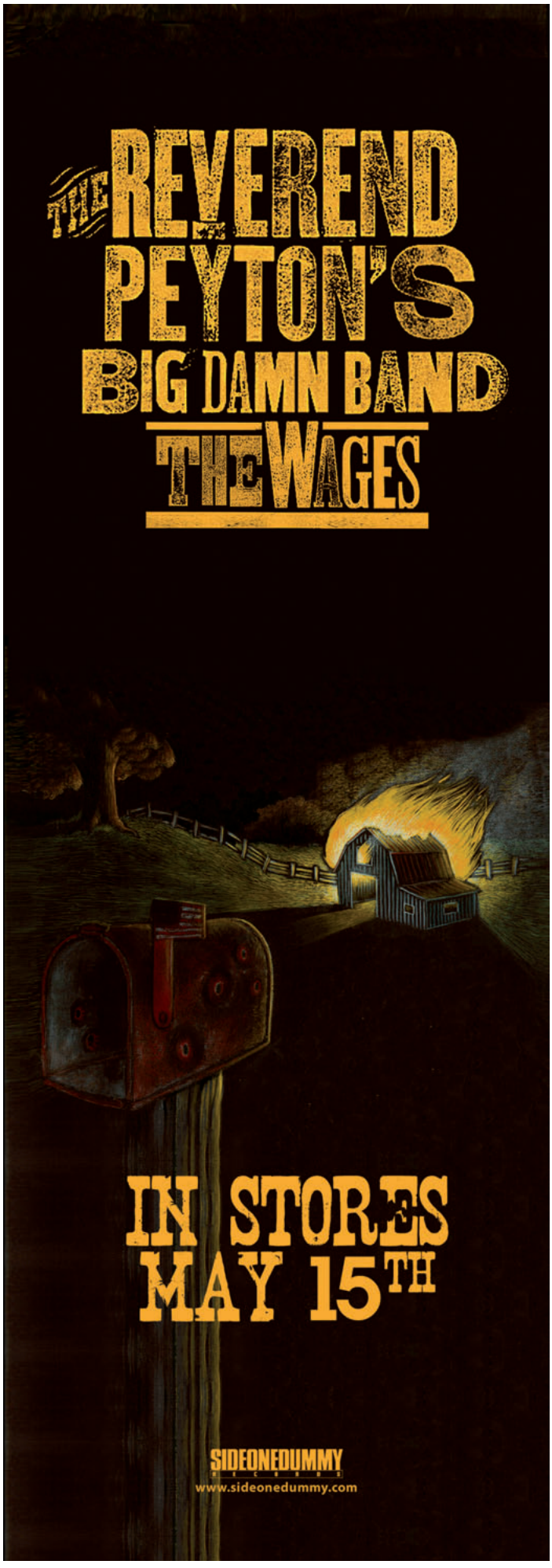
I'll tell you the truth," a man tells an unseen government official, as Koshanejad watches through a slightly ajar door. "Please sir, help me out. I admit it—the movies are mine. I'm really passionate about films and music. But there's nothing objectionable about them. I've got Muslim films, religious films... Christ, Moses, Noah, all of them." His pleas are ignored, so he begs: "On the life of Imam Hossein, please don't give me 80 lashes!"

When I ask Ghobadi about his hopes for the role his film might play in presenting a new perspective on Iran to the rest of the world, he demurs: "There is a tale I know from my grandfather, from his grandfather, and so on. A tale that is in the bosom of every person who lives in the Middle East. When the great powers, the Western countries, came into the region, they were absolutely indifferent with the welfare of the people. Any kind of meaningful reform or supposed help was never substantial enough to lead to progress and reform. So for the last century, Iran has been at odds with indifferent superpowers that act primarily to serve their own interests. And at the same time, Iranians are now faced with the absolutely dictatorial, oppressive behavior of the current Iranian regime and individuals in it."

As a measure of his conviction in confronting that regime, Ghobadi allowed the film to remain in public domain so that anyone in Iran can watch it online, circumventing the country's censors. "It's a way for me to fight an unjust and corrupt system," Ghobadi says. "I refuse to be at the mercy of the Iranian government, who have total control over which movies can be shown and which can't. And I will continue to fight for the sake of myself, for all artists and for the Iranian people, so that we may have a freer exchange of ideas across borders."

Indeed, in Ghobadi's film, Iranian underground cinema and music are a new and vital rallying cry from Iran's youth against their government. In a nation where artistic expression is tightly controlled by the government, the country's youth are supporting and identifying with dissident artists as a form of protest. Music, specifically Western music, has become a catalyst for Iran's cosmopolitan young.

"Through this music," Ghobadi says, "I wanted to show what is happening in Tehran. What the real face of Iran is. This is the first time that a filmmaker like me can make a film about music, after 31 years. I couldn't before, because I was afraid of the government. But these young people in the underground music scene, they taught me to not be afraid. They're the ones who are going to change Iran, and change the world." *Fin*



TILDA SWINTON

the LOVE *factory*

by JOSH JACKSON

photo by MICHAEL LAVINE

It's 1988.

Tilda Swinton is in a wedding dress, and her bridesmaids are all men. Big scruffy men with bouffant wigs and long flowing white gowns of their own. Glockenspiels and organs rub nightmarishly against industrial noise, but she looks radiant in the black-and-white glimpses the Super 8 camera snatches, even as the countryside burns around her—even as she takes pruning shears to the bridal fabric, tearing strips free and chewing them like gum. This is the final scene of Derek Jarman's nightmarish film, The Last of England, *and the young Swinton lends her beauty to a vision of the otherwise grotesque—firing squads in ski masks, refugees among the ruins, heroin addicts in underground lairs, and flames, always flames.*

This experimental film was Swinton's second with the boundary-pushing director, a collaboration that began with her screen debut, *Caravaggio,* and ended seven pictures later in 1993 with *Wittgenstein,* just a year before Jarman's AIDS-related death. The association would indelibly mark the actress' approach to filmmaking, whether carrying on a love affair with Brad Pitt's title character in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,* playing the White Witch in Disney's $180 million adaptation of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* or, most recently, starring as a Russian immigrant in the much-lower budget Italian film *I Am Love.*

Her avant-garde beginnings made her a different kind of leading lady—one who cares less about the size of the project than the passion of those involved; one who's chosen the remoteness of the Scottish Highlands over the tactical advantages of the Hollywood Hills; one who sees herself as a co-conspirator with eager young filmmakers; one who never really left the sway of her radical mentor.

"We used to be referred to as 'the art house,'" Swinton narrates in the Jarman documentary *Derek.* "How it used to irk us then. How disparaging it sounded. How sickly and high-falutin', how pious—and extracurricular. For 'arthouse superstar,' read 'jumbo shrimp.' Yet then as now, the myth prevailed that there was only one mainstream. We were only too happy to know that our audience existed and to hoe the row in peace. Nobody here [in Britain] paid that much attention to us then, that's true. No one ever thought we would make them any money, I suppose. What grace that constituted—not to be identified as national product."

Café Terigo is an oasis in the maelstrom that is Sundance. Sitting halfway up Park City's Main Street, the two-story restaurant offers quiet Italian chamber music that might have served as the score of *I Am Love,* set in end-of-the-20th-Century Milan. She's just finished introducing the movie's second screening, her final official duty at the festival. Her normally flame-red hair is more simmering blonde today, cropped close on the sides. But the green eyes, pale complexion and sharp features that gave the Ice Queen her unquestionable authority are instantly recognizable to anyone who walks past. Draped in a purple shawl, she carries herself with the noble elegance of someone who can trace the family plot back to 9th-Century Scotland. She's warm and engaging, but intimidating enough that I hesitate when attempting to repeat the word "milieu."

She wasn't cast in the role of Emma, the film's quiet protagonist, because she was a perfect fit—she didn't even speak Italian. Instead, the movie was created to fit her, to scratch her most recent itches. At age 49, the actress has never directed, but this is just the latest in a long line of films she's helped create from inception—in this case, with director Luca Guadagnino.

Swinton's acting career began with a season in the Royal Shakespeare Company—that most mainstream and traditional institution—but she was immediately attracted to the fringes, taking on gender-bending theatrical roles, like Mozart in Alexandr Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri* and as a woman

impersonating her husband in *Screenplay: Man to Man: Another Night of Rubbish on the Telly*. By the time she met Jarman, acting had become just another item on a list of things she'd decided wasn't for her. But working on *Caravaggio*, she learned that a performer could also be a filmmaker, that a director with a vision could invite collaboration and allow his cast and crew to flourish.

"I've always been behind a camera," she explains. "That's how I started. Everyone who worked with Jarman worked behind the camera. It was so clear there was nowhere else I could have gone to have that kind of experimental license to play. And so to a certain extent, I've never done anything else, although I have had the great blessing to have been 'invited,' as I describe it, to other people's parties in Hollywood, for example, to go and learn other ways to make films. But what I do, what my real work is, is developing films with filmmakers from scratch."

Just a year after *Caravaggio*, Swinton began one such project with director Sally Potter, an adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, in which Swinton plays the titular ageless noble, who changes from man to woman over the course of 400 years. The film, which Swinton describes as "the first film I kind of developed from scratch with a filmmaker," took five years to make, and Swinton has since made a habit of keeping a number of projects simmering until one bubbles up to the surface.

"I worked with David Mackenzie on *Young Adam* for five or six years," she says, "and I'm constantly in conversation with a few filmmakers, like Lynn Hershman, who I've worked with now three times, and we have plans to continue to work together. The whole long-term, low-key relationship with filmmakers is really what I'm into. And kind of what I feel I'm good for."

Swinton's first foray into the world of big-studio filmmaking came in 2000 with a small part in Danny Boyle's *The Beach*. Soon after, she received her first Golden Globe nomination for her leading performance in *The Deep End*. Since then, she's worked with an amazing array of auteurs: Spike Jonze, Béla Tarr, Jim Jarmusch, Tony Gilroy, the Coen Brothers and David Fincher. But one role seemed as far removed from the world of Jarman as could be realized: the villain in Disney's *Chronicles of Narnia* series.

"Any film geek would be only too lucky to work on a film like that, especially with somebody like Andrew Adamson," she says of the experience. "The system of becoming involved is always the same with me. It's always to do with the conversation with the filmmaker. Generally the filmmaker is someone I know very well, and we're cooking something up over the kitchen table. But in the case of somebody like Andrew Adamson, who I didn't know before, he contacted me in a quite orthodox way. I went to meet him. I liked him very much. He talked about the film he wanted to make. I would have very happily have made that film with him in a garage because I was very interested in the film he wanted to make. It was the sort of added nerdy thrill for me that it was a Disney picture. So I went very willingly along for the ride, and I learned so much about the world of studio filmmaking from that and other studio projects that I've been involved in. But the truth is, the studio films that I've made ... all of those films are experimental films, I would suggest, because all of those films are using extraordinarily pioneering special effects, and they're kind of run by film geeks. It feels very comfortable for me to be with a group of film geeks, whether there are only 15 of them, as in the case of working with Derek Jarman or Lynn Hershman, or if there are 1,500."

Emma sits at a table with her mother-in-law and her future daughter-in-law, three generations of Recchi wives. As the food arrives, the conversation fades and her companions are lost to the shadows. She's alone with her prawns and ratatouille, and that solitude, though brief, is like a glorious awakening. There is love in this meal, and a passion that's been missing from her constricted life.

Swinton's partnership with Luca Guardagnino stemmed from a single conversation, one she hadn't planned on having. The young man had seen *Caravaggio* in high school and was determined to have Swinton star in his short film, *The Penny Arcade Peep Show*. He sent the script to her agency, but never heard back. When he found out the actress would be in Rome for a cinematic presentation, he persisted.

"I approached her and I asked her why she didn't reply to me," he remembers. "And she said, 'Well, I was extremely busy and I didn't have time to read anything in the last month.' And she asked me, 'Did you do it?' And I said, 'No, I didn't because you weren't there.' And I think this got her attention. The morning after we spoke in a bar in Rome, and from there, developed a very strong friendship."

That friendship led to Guadagnino's first feature film, *The Protagonists*, a guerilla documentary about a London murder. They followed that project with a documentary short, *Tilda Swinton: The Love Factory*, which was more of a conversation than a film. "The title is the perfect description of Tilda Swinton," the director says. "It's the idea of a place where discipline and passion co-exist."

It was also where the idea for *I Am Love* began to take shape. Part of the discussion is about the revolution of love—the idea that love isn't really about coming together as a unit, but two lonely souls keeping each other company. "There's a romantic notion that you can deny your solitariness when you come together and you're one," says Swinton. "You stop doing the things that you used to do before you got together and you're just one—you do everything together, and you're never going to be lonely again. Which I think is a great waste of human existence. I think being lonely and solitary is a great resource and to be enjoyed. And if anything, love is going to push you further into that.

"Out of that we decided to make a film about someone for whom the revolution of love really does break everything. We knew that we wanted to make a story around a character I would play. So we knew she would be a woman. Slowly we worked out that we wanted her to be an alien of some sort. So given that I'm not Italian and that I would be an alien anyway, we decided to place it in an Italian high capitalistic situation where denial is really the rule of law and place her in the center of that milieu, so that when love strikes, the honesty of it explodes the situation that she's been in."

It didn't matter to Swinton or Guardagnino that she didn't speak Italian, or that she would be called upon to do so with a Russian accent. They wanted to redeem the idea of melodrama, wondering why it had fallen so out of vogue. They went to Russian novels for inspiration, and to the masters of cinema: Alfred Hitchcock, Douglas Sirk, Luchino Visconti. And they went to Milan.

"We started thinking about this bourgeouis situation, this grid, this very circumscribed world," Swinton says. "It's not the feudal aristocracy of Visconti; it's something much more modern, much less humanistic. It's got a lot to be extremely discreet about. These people made their enormous wealth during the fascistic era. And if you're going to make a film about that milieu in Italy, you know you have to make it in Milan. You walk down what you think is a perfectly normal business street, and if go through a courtyard, you come to a nearly-palazzo, hidden, very discreetly hidden. It's a very particular place and people live in a very particular way there. So you think of someone who comes from a very circumscribed situation. The film is set 10 years ago, so if you backdate it, she comes from Soviet Russia—from that situation into an even more circumscribed situation. She's like an avatar. She has to learn a new language, a new way of walking, a new way of talking, a whole set of behaviors."

Swinton knew two women who had indeed come from Soviet Russia to Italy, one who had settled in Milan and married into a similar situation as her character Emma. She learned from them about alienation, about "the imperative to acquire, the imperative to wear your existence on your person, the codification of your Salvatore Ferragamo shoes and your Damiani jewelry and your Diptyque candles and no way of actually accessing your personal taste or your personal spirit in any way."

As a person out of her language, out of her culture, and naturally quiet, Emma became the perfect vehicle for Swinton to explore the ideas that have most interested her lately: loneliness and the inability to communicate. "I think there's an idea that people are as articulate as lazy writers would like to make them," she says. "They all sound like playwrights, and they all express themselves absolutely clearly to each other, and they all hear each other very clearly and are able to speak back with a very similar voice. What I'm very interested in as a film fan is a kind of cinema that actually looks at people finding it difficult to express themselves and finding themselves in a state of inarticulacy and a kind of state of silence, where they can't necessarily rely on words.

"I think the cinema can do that better than any other art form, can actually take you into someone else's inarticulacy. And it's such a compassionate and humanistic thing to do, to show you that nobody else necessarily knows what they're doing. And that, no matter how close up you go to someone, you can never really understand what they're thinking. And that it's all right—your failure to ever really be able to articulate your thoughts or your failure to really understand anybody else is really fine."

Swinton discovered her own appreciation for solitude as a child. The daughter of a Scottish Major-General father and an Australian mother, Matilda was the lone girl among three brothers. When the youngest brother came along, she had wanted a girl so badly that she asked her mom to take him back. "I loved that moment when I was alone and I felt myself becoming lonely," she said. "It's like when you're out in the cold and you begin to get a bit chilly. You just feel yourself begin to value company again, having been sitting alone in a haystack for two hours. You suddenly go, 'Oh, I wonder what my brothers are doing.'"

PHOTO BY PIERPAOLO FERRAR

She attended boarding schools in England and Scotland before graduating from Cambridge University in 1983. Two years later, she met playwright and painter John Byrne, who moved to London in 1990 to be with her. After Swinton gave birth to twin sons Xavier and Honor in 1998, the couple moved to Nairn, Scotland, just north of Inverness. But while Byrne remains her companion at home, she's begun traveling with another love, her boyfriend-artist Sandro Kopp, whom she met on the set of *Narnia*, where he played a centaur. The 32-year-old has been on her arm at most of her public appearances, and he's quietly at her side here at our lunch. The unusual situation has the apparent blessing of Byrne, and Kopp has even spent time with the family back home in the Highlands.

"The whole concept of romantic love," she says, talking about the film, but also, you sense, explaining her non-traditional lifestyle, "that whole concept that there is one person who will *complete* you, who you are not complete without. And then this person arrives—and then again, there is only one. Ever. And they complete you, and therefore you are never complete without them. And at the same time you are somehow finished with them. There's some kind of Saran Wrap around you as a unit. It feels so unhealthy, the pressure. And when you think of people really being, I would go so far as saying 'indoctrinated' in the feeling that that's the only way to conduct their lives, they will not be able to be viable human beings unless they find this person to complete them. And then they have to stick to it. That's it—that sort of hanging on for dear life. What do they do when they do feel lonely on a Wednesday morning?"

Instead, she professes love for two men, for her 12-year-old boys and for the many filmmakers who call her muse. Like Scottish auteur Lynne Ramsey, with whom she says she's been developing an adaptation of Lionel Shriver's novel, *We Need To Talk About Kevin*. She'll play the mother of a teenage boy who has murdered his classmates: "another alien." She may have entered the world of acting half-heartedly, but she's found her vocation since that first conversation with Jarman, searching, as she says of her mentor in *Derek*, for "that loose corner where we might prize up the carpet and uncover the rich slate of something we might recognize as spirit underneath, something raw and dusty and inarticulate, for heavens sake." *Tim*

BAND OF HORSES

Running Wild

SOUTH CAROLINA'S ROCK 'N' ROLL DARLINGS ARE BACK WITH A BRAND-NEW RECORD. *PASTE* CATCHES UP WITH THE GUYS ON THEIR EUROPEAN TOUR FOR SOME INCREDIBLE MUSIC AND A FEW CHEAP BACKSTAGE LAUGHS

BY JASON KILLINGSWORTH | BAND PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL ANDELMAN

FOR SOMEONE WHO TOUCHED DOWN IN PARIS LESS THAN 24 HOURS AGO AND ONLY HAS A VAGUE CONCEPT OF WHERE EXACTLY HE IS IN THIS SPRAWLING CITY, BAND OF HORSES FRONTMAN BEN BRIDWELL LOOKS REMARKABLY UNPERTURBED. THE BEARDED CROONER IS WEDGED INTO THE CORNER OF A BLACK LEATHER COUCH, ONE COWBOY-BOOTED FOOT DRAPED OVER THE OPPOSING KNEE. HE'S TEASING A BANDMATE WITH A SCROTUM JOKE AFTER OVERHEARING HIM REMARK, "I NEED TO GO GRAB MY BAG IN THE OTHER ROOM." BAM!

What many fans don't realize is that touring—even in glamorous locales—is frequently a crushing bore: killing time in a series of enclosed spaces, waiting to play the same songs you played the night before, and the night before that. Laughter keeps this cyclical tedium from eating one's brain. And when your entourage consists of 11 dudes—five band, six crew—a quip like "that's what she said" falls on the cerebral end of a touring band's humor continuum.

Hanging out in Band of Horses' dressing room, especially when there's jetlag and alcohol in the mix, feels like crashing the *South Park* writers' office. When I ask keyboardist Ryan Monroe if he's had a chance to do anything fun since arriving in France, bassist Bill Reynolds spins around without missing a beat, "Yeah, Ryan, what was her name again?" More snickering.

Anyway, this is what Bridwell knows for certain: He's backstage at a television studio somewhere in the dreary northern outskirts of Paris. The sky outside is grey and drizzling. A couple hours from now, in front of a studio audience, his band will record a 50-minute set to be aired later on what he's heard is "the coolest music program kind of thing for TV here." Beyond that, details get a bit fuzzy. "I don't really know much about it," Bridwell confesses. "I just know we're supposed to show up and try to do good."

L'Album de la Semaine ("The Album of the Week") might as well be France's answer to the UK's *Later...with Jools Holland*. The show features a steady deluge of musical talent, pivoting between stellar emerging bands—Vampire Weekend, The xx and Cat Power have all dropped by—and established stars such as Björk, R.E.M. and The Killers. In the hallway outside the band's dressing room, framed photo collages hang on the walls, displaying snapshots of past performers: Beck's familiar blank stare, the Green Day posse smirking through soot-black eyeliner.

The show's previous rosters may seem like heady company, but this evening's guests have more pressing concerns than who's previously occupied their dressing room. Several pizza boxes just arrived. Everyone seems to have ditched the catered trays of health-conscious sandwich fixings, flocking instead to the scent of pizza dough and melted mozzarella. You can't visit France, after all, without sampling the country's delectable bread and cheese. Check...and check.

The much-anticipated release of Band of Horses' third album, *Infinite Arms*, is still a month off, but the band has already settled into a promotional touring groove that will stretch well into the summer months. This Paris stop marks the beginning of a 10-day European run, after which the band returns to the U.S. to open a string of Midwestern and East Coast dates for Pearl Jam—a huge opportunity for Bridwell and company to expand their stable of fans. The Pearl Jam opening slot will be Band of Horses' first time rocking stadium venues with dopey-sounding corporate monikers. Then: 'Hello Cleveland!' Now: 'Hello Quicken Loans Arena!'

At roughly 11 weeks, this will also be the band's longest stretch of non-stop touring to date. Bridwell is less than thrilled about being away from his wife and two-year-old daughter Annabelle for such a protracted period, but *Infinite Arms* has been almost three years in the making and anything less would, in his words, "do all that work injustice."

The band's last record, *Cease to Begin*, was released in 2007 by storied Seattle label Sub Pop, and debuted at #35 on the U.S. Billboard 200 chart, moving about 21,000 copies in its first week. If their triumphant showing at this year's SXSW Music Festival—"Band of Horses killed it," wrote fest correspondent David Carr on the *New York Times* website—is any indication, *Infinite Arms* could post even more impressive stats.

The band's unabashedly grandiose, country-tinged rock has grown considerably tighter and more melodic over the years. Bridwell's voice is the main attraction—its luminescent clarity and high-lonesome timbre evoke a choirboy in a ten-gallon hat. On the band's 2006 debut, *Everything All the Time*, producer Phil Ek doused the vocals in My Morning Jacket's trademark corn-silo reverb, lending them an elegiac vastness. *Infinite Arms* dials back the reverb just enough to warm up the sound, but not enough to bake out the ethereality.

Though Band of Horses' early outings had a relatively

narrow range—in his review of *Cease To Begin*, veteran rock critic Robert Christgau wryly noted, "In a year you'll still remember most of these tunes, and you'll still wish it didn't take 34 minutes to get through 10 of them."—it's hard to imagine the same being said of *Infinite Arms*, which rambles with delightful unpredictability. Opener "Factory" teeters and sways like some anthemic junior-high slow dance, buoyed along by undulating string washes. Bridwell's lyrics paint an ambiguous scene—an awkward confrontation in a hotel lobby between the narrator and a man in an elevator who, upon recognizing him, leaps out and decides "he better hike it to the second floor." When pressed on the story behind the song, Bridwell says, "You can't really tell, but it's a highly personal and sad song. Like, to me, it's incredibly sad, but I don't give away exactly what it is."

The guitar riffage underpinning "Laredo" crackles with the amp-melting euphoria of Neil Young & Crazy Horse. A silky-smooth vocal glides over the top, adding a summertime Top-40 shimmer.

Joy-starved, mole-rat hipsters whose most withering kiss-off is to call a record "safe" will spontaneously combust if exposed to *Infinite Arms*. You won't find a single ragged edge jutting from these tunes. The album aspires to sound gorgeous, without apology. It's no surprise that a large chunk of the vocals were recorded in sunny Los Angeles. You can't listen to the balmy chorus harmonies of "Trudy" without recalling The Eagles and the 1960s Laurel Canyon folk scene.

The upbeat tunes sparkle like the polished hood of a '69 Camaro weaving down the Pacific Coast Highway. Dig the guitar-pop ecstasy of "Dilly," which echoes hook-crafting geniuses like Teenage Fanclub and the Pernice Brothers. The breakneck guitar churn of "Northwest Apartment" is a $450 speeding ticket waiting to happen. If you enjoy listening to music while driving, consider yourself warned. Ben Bridwell is a nice guy, but he will not defend you in court.

You know someone is a music lover when he's willing to decamp 2,981 miles away to the opposite corner of the country because his favorite bands rarely come to town.

That's precisely what Bridwell did in the mid '90s, bidding farewell to Charleston, S.C., and moving to Seattle where he could catch his favorite bands every night of the week. He already had some friends living in the area so it seemed like a safe enough proposition. Sure enough, his connections came through, helping him land a job washing dishes—"bustin' suds, as we say in the biz," Bridwell laughs—at the renowned Crocodile Café, despite the fact that he was still underage and this "café" was actually a bar and music club.

Bridwell got busy immediately, launching his own label (Brown Records) so he could release projects by his friends in local band Carissa's Wierd, whose austere sound was heavily influenced by minimalist rockers Low. When Carissa's Wierd drummer Jeremiah Green left the band to join Modest Mouse, Bridwell was invited to fill the vacancy. One slight problem: He'd never played the drums. The band didn't mind. In fact, their primary objective was to hire a friend they could bring on tour whom they didn't routinely feel like stabbing in the face. The rest could be learned on the job.

"YOU CAN'T REALLY TELL, BUT IT'S A HIGHLY PERSONAL AND SAD SONG. LIKE, TO ME, IT'S INCREDIBLY SAD, BUT I DON'T GIVE AWAY EXACTLY WHAT IT IS."

To simplify the mechanics involved in playing drums, Bridwell set up a bare-bones kit without a bass drum and just focused on keeping time. The band jokingly referred to his unorthodox drumming posture as 'The Broken Puppet.' When asked for an impromptu demonstration, Bridwell looks as though he's trying to free himself from an invisible straitjacket.

Carissa's Wierd eventually broke up in 2003. The band's practice space wasn't being used, but there were still loads of guitars and pedals lying around. Bridwell took advantage of this situation by going down there every day to write songs on the guitars. Again, there was one slight problem.

"I'd never played guitar. I didn't even know how to do chords, so I would just detune everything to get it where my hand made what sounded like the right thing to do. So now I have to travel with a million guitars 'cause they're all in these weird-ass tunings that I'm stuck with now. We're lucky that the guys in the band now are such good players that they can figure out even the weird shit, my tunings and stuff."

Bridwell ain't kidding. Even though Band of Horses has gone through its fair share of personnel changes over the years, not to mention its relocation back to the great state of South Carolina, the band's current lineup is devastatingly good.

While recording of *Cease To Begin*, Bridwell invited childhood friend Ryan Monroe to join the band on keyboards and guitar. Monroe also lends the sublime harmony vocals that have become a staple of the band's sound. The two were even on the same little-league team as kids growing up in Columbia, S.C. ("back when we were a couple of little fart chasers," Monroe says, chuckling at the memory). Drummer Creighton Barrett also joined the band circa *Cease To Begin*, and rounding out the five-piece are the most recent additions: Asheville, N.C. singer/songwriter Tyler Ramsey on lead guitar, and Bill Reynolds, who plays a slinky, nasty bass guitar.

With such talented players in the mix, Bridwell decided he wanted *Infinite Arms* to be far more of a band effort than *Cease To Begin*, whose process he describes as "Here's my songs, play along, here we go." The members emailed demos back and forth, contributing not just arrangement ideas but entire songs. Two of the records' strongest cuts are "Older," with its loping country-barroom shuffle, and tender ballad "Evening Kitchen," written by Monroe and Ramsey, respectively. Bridwell insisted that both tracks feature their writers on lead vocals.

"I've been telling our management, or anyone involved—even Phil [Ek] before we started the record—that [Ryan's song] 'Older' [was going to be on the record]. ... There's even people

going, 'I think it has a chance to be a single if you sing lead on it.' And it's like, 'Fuck you, Ryan's singing the song.' You know, shit like that. Don't say shit like that."

The band's confidence as a unit also extended to production duties, which they decided to handle themselves after running into scheduling difficulties with Ek. After all, Bridwell's early experiences picking up the drums and guitar turned out OK. How hard could producing really be? Listening to *Infinite Arms*, with its miraculously cohesive mixture of divergent styles and ideas, the answer would appear to be *not very*.

Coming full circle, Bridwell has even revived his old Brown label so he and the band can release it themselves, in conjunction with Fat Possum and Columbia. They financed the record themselves. They own the masters. These particular Horses are done wearing saddles.

The night following their *L'Album de la Semaine* taping, Band of Horses are playing a gig at La Flèche d'Or in the eastern part of Paris. The venue's location originally housed the Charonne train station, which operated a Paris-London route in the late-19th and early 20th century. In the '90s, a group of former students from a Parisian art college transformed the space into a concert hall, and it's become a prime venue for up-and-coming bands of every musical persuasion.

Tonight's show is at capacity, and there's still a line of people stretching down the block hoping to be let inside. Those lucky enough to have made it in are dripping with sweat from the room's sauna-like atmosphere. The chatter is deafening, and you can hear a disproportionate number of American accents cutting through the din. Every American college student studying abroad in Paris seems to have converged.

Ramsey opens the show with a laid-back set of acoustic tunes. And then after a short break, the full band strolls onstage to thunderous applause. Even though Bridwell has a fan at the foot of the stage blowing air up into his face—I imagine it's the same sort of fan used to blow back Faith Hill's hair in music-video shoots—he's sweating profusely, just like everyone else.

The band delivers the louder tunes with feral ferocity, whipping the crowd into a frenzy, only to tug back the reins at just the right moments. On the organ-driven, slow-burning "Marry Song," Bridwell and Monroe harmonize with pitch-perfect ease, facing each other bromantically while they sing. Bridwell smiles, relishing the sound of the vocal interplay and the opportunity to perform with his best friends. There's no posturing here. This is real music, played with real feeling.

Toward the end of the show, the band plays "No One's Gonna Love You," in which Bridwell repeatedly sings, "No one's gonna love you more than I do." I reach out and squeeze my pregnant wife's hand, letting the song do the talking. The French couple to my right is violently perfecting the style of kissing their country supposedly invented.

"I didn't set out to write a love song that sounds that sappy," Bridwell assured me during our earlier conversation. "I'm a fucking dude. But when it taps you on the shoulder, it's like you're more of a pussy trying to disguise it, or trying to make up something that's so weird no one can understand it. Be a man. If it's trying to be written that way, write it and move on to the next song."*Fin*

Sister Act 2

BY MARISA MELTZER

LILITH FAIR IS BACK. WHY DO WE CARE?

When Lilith Fair—Sarah McLachlan's all-woman music festival, which toured the U.S. in the balmiest months of 1997-1999—announced a revival tour, a comeback scheduled to trek across North America this summer, my best friend and I squealed with delight and immediately made plans to go. But first, a confession: I didn't attend Lilith the first time around. My adolescence had been spent going to Bikini Kill and L7 concerts, so the folky music of the Lilith roster struck me as too self-consciously feminine, the sense of community too contrived. So what happened—in music, feminism, and politics—in the ensuing 11 years that made the festival's return seem not only necessary, but kind of cool?

Since Lilith last made its rounds across the country, I watched as the Pussycat Dolls, Paris Hilton and Jessica Simpson dominated not just the charts, but the totality of pop culture. It was enough to make me nostalgic for Lilith's mild-mannered feminism without having ever attended. Maybe I'd missed something the first time around.

Lilith Fair was created after concert promoters told McLachlan they wouldn't book two women on the same bill, she tells me just after finishing up her latest album, *The Laws of Illusion*. At that time, there were only a few women playing at traveling alterna-fest Lollapalooza, and the supermacho Ozzfest, H.O.R.D.E. and Warped tours were raking in millions a year in ticket sales, marketing themselves to teenage boys. The 1999 Woodstock anniversary concert, which featured performances by the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Limp Bizkit—both a far cry from the peacenik crowd of the 1969 version—was marred by reports of several rapes, with at least one gang rape allegedly taking place in the mosh pit, near the front of the stage. Music festivals were inhospitable places for women (both as band members and fans), and Lilith arose as an alternative. "They said no one would come, which is so ridiculous and insulting," McLachlan says. "I had a desire to prove them wrong."

McLachlan booked the inaugural Lilith in 1997 with a handpicked roster heavy on confessional singer-songwriters (Fiona Apple, Shawn Colvin, Paula Cole, Lisa Loeb, Jewel, Suzanne Vega). Besides music, the festival focuses on activism through its emphasis on feminist charities ($1 from each ticket sold benefited a local women's organization) and activity

booths, where organizations could distribute information on their causes. "Lilith showcased women's music that was not solely predicated on sexual display on stage," says writer and University of Michigan communications professor Susan J. Douglas, whose latest book, *Enlightened Sexism*, examines pop culture and feminism over the last two decades. "These were women who were respected as singers and songwriters, who were thinking, creative subjects who had things to say rather than be objects to look at."

Lilith was a commercial success: The first Lilith tour earned $16 million, making it that year's highest-grossing touring festival. And more importantly, the festival created one of the few women-only (or perhaps more accurately, women-centric, since men were definitely allowed to come and get their folk on) spaces in the late-90s mainstream. Radicals, riot grrrls and women from various subcultures—in other words, people like me—had access to such separatist women-only spaces, and had benefited from the experience of life without men, whether that meant speaking more freely, carrying oneself differently, feeling a sense of safety, or escaping sexual commodification. But most women rarely had these opportunities, and McLachlan offered them a version of collective feminist activity that was missing from the mainstream pop culture of the time. "I really love the idea of a woman-only space. It's really an old punk idea, but Lilith introduced people like me, who grew up in small town America, pre-Internet, to concepts like that," says Gossip's Beth Ditto, who didn't go to Lilith Fair while growing up in Arkansas, but will be playing on the tour this summer.

"I think if I had gone to Lilith while I was in high school, it would've changed my entire world," says Laneia Jones, the executive editor at Autostraddle.com, an online community for lesbian and bisexual women. Like me, Jones felt she was "too awesome" for Sarah McLachlan and company during Lilith's maiden voyage. But in retrospect, she thinks that going would have done her some good. "I lived in a rural town and felt constantly trapped by it. None of my friends were like me, so I just always left out. Instead of embracing the weird, I hid it and pretended to fit in. I think going to Lilith would've shown me that I wasn't alone."

Lilith's strong point—its focus on gender—was also one of its weak points. Centering on female performers was gutsy, but it didn't necessarily make for a good music festival. *Salon* writer Carlene Bauer dismissed the Lilith aesthetic for its homogenous, hippieish, "Massengill-meets-Celestial Seasonings" vibe, which sums how a lot of women viewed the festival. My friend Sheri Hood, who managed bands like Stereolab during the Lilith era, likens the scene to a guilty pleasure: "Lilith bands are the musical equivalent of chick flicks. You might indulge in it, but it's not really where you want to be." Lilith's appeal was too broad for women (like my teenage self) who considered themselves serious music fans.

Lilith was a direct descendent of "women's music," a genre that included singers like Holly Near and Cris Williamson, known for being earnest and folky, and was more closely aligned to 1970s-style Second Wave feminism. The 1990s heralded the arrival of feminism's Third Wave, which, in turn, brought with it a celebration of the more joyous side of girlhood and modern marriages of feminism and music—less "I Am Woman" and more "Rebel Girl." Take, for example, the Portland trio Sleater-Kinney (currently on extended hiatus), who turned down an offer to play at Lilith. "We discussed it at the time, and ultimately decided against it," says Sleater-Kinney singer/guitarist Corin Tucker. "Our band was really from the punk-rock tradition of playing small clubs, all-ages venues, and keeping ticket prices low." But their problem with Lilith ended being one of aesthetics: Their dueling guitars and shouted lyrics were a far cry from the gentle balladry of McLachlan and company. "To be honest," Tucker said, "I don't think the lineup really fit our musical taste."

We have a generation that was told they can be and do anything—as long as you're hot, slim, not too pushy, and don't have ties to feminism or ambitions as a woman.

The revival of Lilith taps into that frustration.

Being the sole mainstream music festival tasked with representing 50% of the population had its own burdens, and there was plenty of room for criticism. Lilith organizers made efforts to have some measure of diversity in the lineup, both in race and sound, particularly in its second and third years as Missy Elliott, Cibo Matto and Erykah Badu signed up. A more diverse lineup made Lilith's latter years feel a little less one-note, but it also meant that all the artists were less united. Many weren't already acquainted, as the original performers had been, and the ones who met while on tour didn't necessarily relate to women's music, or to one another. As time went on there were fewer all-girl jam sessions. "Because it was more successful, they had to be more self-conscious after the first year," remembers Jennifer Baumgardner, a writer and activist who was dating Indigo Girl Amy Ray at the time and traveled with her to 10 or so Lilith Fair shows. "They went out of their way to get Missy and Erykah. They were outreached to, but if you want to have a truly diverse lineup, you start up that way, with a diverse group of organizers."

In 1999, after three years of Lilith Fair, McLachlan and her fellow organizers were ready for a break from the road. She was "sick to death" of playing the same songs and wanted time to record new material and be at home. But beyond her personal reasons for winding down the festival, there were broader cultural ones. McLachlan remembers seeing the "door slammed shut on singer/songwriters" around the turn of the

century. She's not the only one; upon first hearing the Britney Spears song "...Baby One More Time," Tori Amos supposedly declared the end of the female singer/songwriter era. A new crop of pop singers—Christina Aguilera, Mandy Moore, Jessica Simpson and Spears—became ubiquitous (as did boy bands like 'N Sync and the Backstreet Boys); adult women were encouraged to act more childlike and children were encouraged to act more like grown women. Raunch culture—defined by Ariel Levy in her 2005 book *Female Chauvinist Pigs* as women making sex objects of other women and of themselves—took a strong hold not long after, with pole-dancing workshops and *Girls Gone Wild* videos leading the way. The demise of Lilith certainly wasn't to blame, but these days, it feels more and more like its return might be a ticket out.

Now, 10 years into the new millennium, we're finally nostalgic for the 1990s. Flannel shirts are ubiquitous on the street. Fashion bloggers—some of whom weren't born until after Bill Clinton's first election—are celebrating Doc Martens. On television, remakes of shows like *90210* and *Melrose Place* are finding new audiences while still employing actors who once plastered our bedroom walls. Even New Kids on the Block have reunited.

So what are we all so nostalgic for? Maybe for earnestness. The '90s were unapologetically, idealistically political—from gay rights to safe sex and environmental activism. And being political wasn't code for "boring"; after the more politically dormant '80s, it was actually cool. Between the gay-marriage debate, the long-overdue rejection of raunch culture and all the promise of Obama's presidential election, I think America revisited some of that same politically charged excitement in 2008. But I'm not sure it was entirely successful—women didn't exactly unite for one candidate, though I did recently discover that Sophie B. Hawkins, of "Damn I Wish I Was Your Lover" fame, rewrote her 1993 hit for Hillary Clinton's campaign as "Damn! We Wish You Were President."

Women never disappeared from politics, or from culture, but the '90s were a different time: No one owned $1500 handbags or had heard of a Brazilian wax, no one had heard of The Pussycat Dolls or Paris Hilton, and women and men alike flocked to see politically charged artists like Liz Phair and Hole. That '90s spirit—which didn't feel innocent at the time, but which sure looks that way now—has gone missing from pop culture in the last decade. "Women musicians have seen this is a moment as time to push back again," the University of Michigan's Susan Douglas says. "We have a generation that was ... told they can be and do anything—as long as you're hot, slim, not too pushy, and don't have ties to feminism or ambitions as a woman. The revival of Lilith taps into that frustration."

It's not as if Lilith is only recently in demand again, though; in almost every interview she's done since the festival ended, McLachlan was asked whether it would ever return. It took a decade for her to start thinking about how touring with an all-female festival could be fun once again. The result is Lilith's 2010 incarnation, with an eclectic roster that includes alt-country legend Emmylou Harris and retro-pop band the Go-Gos, R&B belter Mary J. Blige, "Tik Tok" songstress Ke$ha, angular electro-rock band Metric and country duo Sugarland. "Back when I started out they said women couldn't sell tickets or records, and we've proved them wrong," says country legend Loretta Lynn, who's on the lineup, too. I asked McLachlan what the performers share (besides X chromosomes) this time around. "Everybody on the bill," she said, "is a real musician, plays their parts, and has a hand in their songs. It's real music—that's the common denominator."

It feels like things are changing for women in the mainstream, maybe even more than in the underground. If you take the Grammys as an example, female performers like Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift and Beyoncé are dominating popular music right now. But even though it's so much more normal for women to be making music today (think of the girl-rock camps that have popped up globally, teaching 8-year-olds how to play drum solos), female musicians still have to address their gender in a way that men don't. "People never let you forget that you are a woman," Ditto says. "Until that stops being an issue, we can never have too much unity."

The music industry has changed enough in the past decade that banding together might be a smart financial move. "Yes, it seems like they want to celebrate women," Tucker says. "But it also really comes across that they want to be a successful concert act. And why not? The really big rock acts make their money from touring these days, and they make millions. It looks like the ladies will be competing for those dollars this summer, and good for them."

Everybody on the bill ... is a real musician, plays their parts, and has a hand in their songs.

It's real music—that's the common denominator.

For others, the appeal of Lilith is simpler. Neo-soul singer Jill Scott, who is also on this year's Lilith tour, says "I don't know if it's necessarily important for women to be playing together, but it's fun. The reality is that we're here and we're coming like warrior women. I just want to rock out and have a good time and feel all that estrogen in the air."

Despite all this talk of Lilith's implicit feminism, McLachlan doesn't think you have to be a feminist to enjoy it. "I think there are definitely tones of feminism underneath it. It's not the be-all, end-all, but I'm supporting women, and I'm supporting the idea of women succeeding. If you want to call that feminism, go ahead."

Lilith seems to be banking on fans attending for myriad reasons: for nostalgia for a decade that's passed, to see bands play they may never see otherwise, to support a giant touring summer festival of women. Like it or not, Lilith has come to represent the state of women and music in America. And that's enough to make me want to go. *Fin*

MR. UNPOPULAR

BY MARK KROTOV

IN HIS NEW NOVEL, GARY SHTEYNGART TAKES ON THE BIG THEMES—WAR, TYRANNY AND TALKING OTTERS. HE'S A TALENTED SATIRIST AND AN UNREPENTANT LITERARY GLUTTON. NO WONDER HE'S SO OUT OF FASHION.

In 2007, over a teetering pile of pigs' feet in a midtown Manhattan Korean restaurant, writer Gary Shteyngart told me that he doesn't think of himself as an intellectual. "I'm an entertainer," he said, with the self-deprecating delivery of Borscht Belt comedian. "Like Eddie Murphy, or Condoleezza Rice."

Three years later, we were back at a Korean restaurant in Midtown. It was bright and noisy, a study in contrasts: clean white walls and right angles interrupted by tables laden with anarchic heaps of ribeye, broiled pork and fiery kimchi. I was asking Shteyngart about his new novel,*Super Sad True Love Story,* which comes out in July. It's a boisterous, romantic, unabashedly political, altogether wonderful vision of a dark, stupid American future. What was it that had led him to write a book this messy, this bold and loud?

"We're having a Korean meal," he said between mouthfuls of meat wrapped in lettuce leaves. "I enjoy the protectionism of certain Japanese foods—they're small, they're done with a lot of thought behind them. But often, I want to eat a lot of meat and I want myself to be on fire. That's what I want to do. Sure, it's sloppier than certain cuisines. Or classical French versus southern Italian, for example. You know where my sympathies lie. They lie with southern Italian, Korean—that's the kind of person I am. I don't give a crap if every sentence isn't beautiful."

Not to say that Shteyngart's books are especially food-centric any more than those of, say, Sam Lipsyte (a friend, colleague, and major touchstone of Shteyngart's) or Jonathan Franzen. But the way he talks about food—passionately, angrily, referentially—is the way he talks, and writes, about everything. In an age of carefulness and small stakes, Shteyngart's grand literary ambitions—hilarious, apocalyptic, romantic—evoke Joseph Heller and George Orwell in equal measure and seem just as revolutionary. "This is also a book about too much love," he writes on the first page of *Absurdistan,* his 2006 bestseller, and indeed, reading Shteyngart is not for the easily over-stimulated.

Shteyngart was born in Leningrad in 1972 and moved to the United States with his family when he was seven years old. He grew up in Little Neck, Queens and went to Stuyvesant, the legendary public high school also attended by Eric Holder, Thelonious Monk and Lucy Liu. He went Oberlin (which might have something in common with *Absurdistan*'s Accidental College, described as "a venerable midwestern institution for young New York, Chicago and San Francisco aristocrats where the virtues of democracy are often debated at teatime," and where "we were taught that our dreams and our beliefs were all that mattered") and then returned to New York.

Back on home turf, he spent the next few years intoxicated ("I was kind of a party animal when I got out") and

getting fired from jobs at various nonprofits, including the New York Association for New Americans. "We'd all get trashed at work—I'd write, and I'd get trashed," Shteyngart says, still a bit bewildered by his good fortune among the unfortunate. "There were so many Russian poets working in the department of communications, and our job was to write brochures for Russians coming in like, 'You're going to an American party—Don't get drunk out of your mind and beat your wife—Don't do that!; Deodorant—Use it!; AIDS: BIG Problem."

Shteyngart was undergoing an education of his own. He had taken writing classes at Oberlin, and by the time he graduated he had written two thirds of *The Russian Debutante's Handbook*, his wry, extraordinarily funny satire of Russians, Jews and Prague's expatriate bohemians. Five years later, he decided to get an MFA—in his words, "I wanted two more years of partying."

"I was kind of apprehensive about what that pile of applications might look like in terms of quantity and quality," novelist Change-rae Lee told me by phone from Princeton, where he now teaches. "When I came across his application I just stopped and I forgot what I was doing. Most of the time, when you're reading applications, you're obviously reading, but you're also in survival mode." But this wasn't like that. By the time Shteyngart entered the MFA program in 2000, he had a deal to publish *Debutante* through Riverhead, Lee's publisher.

Debutante is the story of 25-year-old Vladimir Girshkin, who, seven years out of an elite math-and-science high school and three years out of a Midwestern college, half-works (full-time, part-effort) at the Emma Lazarus Immigration Absorption Society. But just when you think you're in perilous *roman à clef* territory, you encounter Russian mafiosi, a gay Catalan drug lord and the confusing, tragic city of Prague, in all its mid-1990s poverty and decadence. *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* eventually became known as a hilarious and overheated novel, though not everyone initially saw it like that.

"The MFA workshop in some ways I don't think was very helpful to him," Chang-rae Lee told me very diplomatically. "His book at that point was far ahead of any workshopping." Shteyngart put it more directly: "I wasn't allowed to tell people I had a book deal. So the critique was like, 'Oh my god, this is terrible; it's too clever by half.'"

Debutante was published in June 2002, soon after Shteyngart received his MFA. The book received extraordinary exposure—reviews by Michiko Kakutani in the *Times* and A. O. Scott in the *Sunday Times*, and pages of lavish praise from everywhere and everyone, comparing the 30-year-old to Bellow, Martin Amis, Nabokov, Malamud, and Henry Roth. Suddenly, Shteyngart (who says he "could have published it a long time before I did, but I was so ashamed of writing about the Russian experience"), the failed charity worker, the scourge of MFA students—well, he was a writer.

> YOU'RE GOING TO AN AMERICAN PARTY—DON'T GET DRUNK OUT OF YOUR MIND AND BEAT YOUR WIFE—DON'T DO THAT!; DEODORANT—USE IT!; AIDS: BIG PROBLEM.

Gary Shteyngart lives on the seventh floor of a massive co-op building in the oldest, strangest part of the Lower East Side. It's a 10-minute walk to the closest subway, and there's a feeling of slowness, of tentativeness, as you walk toward the East River from the East Broadway stop on the F—as if this little outcrop of lower Manhattan is slowly emerging from the recesses of your memory. Orthodox Jewish boys hang out on playgrounds dwarfed by hulking red brick towers named after union leaders (Shteyngart's building was financed by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union in the early 1950s), Puerto Rican kids play handball on half-empty courts, and the gentle slope of the Williamsburg Bridge looms over everything in sight, its white noise steady and oddly calm.

Shteyngart's apartment is bright, clean, sparse and gently peppered with art. His bookshelves are stocked with new fiction (much of which he has generously blurbed) and weighty non-fiction books like Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower* and Tim Weiner's *Legacy of Ashes*. (Shteyngart has never shied away from being seen as a political novelist, and he reads widely and travels extensively, largely thanks to his gig as contributing editor for *Travel + Leisure*, for which he writes irreverent travelogues about Azerbaijan, Bangkok and Rome, among many other envious assignments.)

Misha Vainberg, narrator of *Absurdistan*, also has a fondness for brutalism; the 325 pound Russian says that it's his "Stalinist gigantamania" that leads him to love New York's Twin Towers, which "looked to me like the promise of socialist realism fulfilled, boyhood science fiction extended into near-infinity." From Shteyngart's balcony, you could be looking out onto a very clean Soviet city, which suits him just fine.

"He might have chosen his neighborhood with [*Super Sad*] in mind," Shteyngart's friend, the novelist John Wray, told me. As Shteyngart and I walked to Chinatown for back-to-back pork-filled dinners, he told me about the depressing onslaught of death notices for senior citizens—the building's original tenants—that he's seen posted by the elevators over the last few years.

Shteyngart is a writer chronically incapable of telling stories that do not refract his immediate context and his concerns, so it makes sense that this neighborhood, with its dying neighbors, unassuming diversity and past-tense futurism would create and permeate *Super Sad True Love Story*. "Gary was definitely sort of inhabiting," Wray says. "Projecting the fictional world of his novel onto the place where he lived and the way that he lived while he was writing it."

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Super Sad is set in the near future—how near largely depends on the degree of your own pessimism. The United States is in calamitous decline: war with Venezuela is going poorly, the only reliable dollars are the yuan-pegged ones, Defense Secretary Rubenstein makes Dick Cheney look like George McGovern, and the government communicates with kitschy homilies and an iron fist. (Jeffrey Otter, the frightening American Restoration Authority's cheerful, ominous mascot, frequently says things like "I would love to welcome you back to the new United States of America. Look out world! There's no stoppin' us now!") Against this backdrop, a romance unfolds between 39-year-old Russian-American Lenny Abramov, a relic of the book-reading era, and 24-year-old Korean-American Eunice Park, who casually drops JBF ("just butt-fucking") into conversation and rarely looks away from her äppärät, an iPad-like device so powerful and data-filled that it makes intimacy, speculation, and imagination seem like obsolete concepts, much as the printing press did in Balzac's *Lost Illusions*.

Shteyngart's first two novels didn't leave much room to breathe, and *Super Sad True Love Story* is no different. It's an extremely ambitious book, albeit an unfashionable one, a work of speculative fiction, inspired by *Asimov's Science Fiction* magazine and the nuclear-holocaust films that Shteyngart watched on TV in the 1980s. Back at the Korean restaurant, before our soju arrived ("They look at two bearded Russians," Shteyngart said of us, "and say 'oh you want the strong stuff'"), he had told me that "I wanted to, as you said, write very unfashionably—the diary format. I wanted to write stuff that the current generation of hipster writers would say, 'Aw, this is crap. This is so against the invention of language. This is just two characters who love each other and then they write some crap down.' What could be more unfashionable and antique than that?"

This is neither a pose nor residual MFA hostility. Shteyngart is very clear on what he wants from fiction: "I want the truth, and I want to be entertained reading it. It doesn't seem like a tall order, but these days, it's become one." The critic and novelist Edmund White, whose praise appears on the back of *Super Sad*, told me he was pleased that the book was "free of irony—so much American writing is ironic, and I think that it's a kind of poison in American life that corrodes everything."

"I was in deep pain writing this," Shteyngart says of *Super Sad*, in pain from the state of the world, in pain from imagining it getting worse—and he clearly didn't make any effort to distance the book from his sorrow. Of his three novels' narrators, Lenny is by far the most similar to the author—in spirit, in character, in melancholy. Lenny's apartment number is even the same as Shteyngart's own, though he plans to have moved out by the time the book is published—heading north to the far more serene, and sterile, Gramercy. And neither man's anxieties are all world-historical; one of the most poignant motifs in *Super Sad* is Lenny's dogged love of printed books, which Eunice (and everyone in her generation) finds smelly and socially repugnant. It's jarring to read a novel that acknowledges, if not prophesizes, its

WHAT WILL PEOPLE BE LIKE IF LONG-FORM TEXT IS NO LONGER COMPREHENSIBLE TO THEM? WE'RE ALL DOING IT. WE'RE ALL SHIFTING AWAY FROM IT.

own irrelevance. "As an immigrant," Shteyngart says, "I have to pay a mortgage. Big freaking mortgage. It feels very visceral to me—what if this thing dies? This is my living here! And the other question is: What will people be like if long-form text is no longer comprehensible to them? We're all doing it. We're all shifting away from it."

I asked writer Mary Gaitskill, a friend of Shteyngart, what set *Super Sad* apart from his first two novels. "I thought it was very personal—it had a kind of emotional rawness to it," she said. "This is about something that's quite true, that's happening—it's barely exaggerated." Shteyngart has found a way to convey the darkest developments of our time—patriotism run amok; stupidity as aspiration; the collapse of empathy, particularly toward the downtrodden—and he has brought them to life in a way that comes naturally: with love.

"There's a real-life love story that parallels the more cartoonish one in the book," Edmund White said. "There's a very tender heart in the midst of utopia." That real-life story is the one about Shteyngart's own engagement to, as it happens, a Korean-American woman. (It should be noted that the similarities with Eunice end there—his fiancée is a lawyer who most likely does not shop at stores called JuicyPussy or spend her days chatting on GlobalTeens as Eunice does.) As exaggerated as its sentiment might be, the novel's opening line—"Dearest Diary, Today I've made a major decision: *I am never going to die*," might ring truer to Shteyngart now than at any other point in his life. There is more to lose than ever before.

Super Sad may not be the funniest of Shteyngart's three books, but it is the wisest, the most direct and the most affecting. In a perceptive review of *Absurdistan* for the *London Review of Books*, Philip Connors wrote, "For Misha there are no consequences, ever," and it's true that in *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* and *Absurdistan*, Shteyngart's wit allowed his characters quite a bit of moral latitude. But in this book, as White says, "there's a new seriousness." No one gets off easy.

If all those MFA students' beef with Shteyngart was a matter of style—perhaps his sentences were messy or his tone was uneven or he wrote like an entertainer, not like a writer—then Shteyngart's problem with much of contemporary fiction is one of stakes. "Some avant-garde people think they take a lot of risks—they really don't," he tells me. "They're taking something small and chiseling it to a certain beautiful pebble. It can be appreciated but what we do can do so much more, and that's where the sloppiness and the flavors and the meat come in. If you don't have a fire burning beneath the meat of your work, it's always gonna taste raw."

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BY

NICK DIULIO

GAME OVER

ADDICTED GAMERS TRY TO KICK THE HABIT

IT'S NOON, AND PETER IS STILL IN BED, PROPPED UP BY PILLOWS AND A WALL IN HIS SHADES-DRAWN DORM ROOM. HIS LAPTOP BURNS HOT AGAINST HIS THIGHS, ITS COOLING-FAN WHIRRING ON OVERDRIVE. CLASS IS STARTING SOON, BUT HE HAS TIME TO PLAY JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER. HE'S BEEN AT WORLD OF WARCRAFT SINCE HE WOKE UP. IT'S FALL 2009, AND PETER IS ON HIS FIRST SEMESTER OF COLLEGE; STACKS OF OVERDUE HOMEWORK, FAILED QUIZZES AND EXAMS LITTER HIS DESK LIKE SO MANY SHAVINGS OF A LIFE BEING WHITTLED AWAY. BUT NONE OF IT MATTERS. EVERYTHING IMPORTANT TO HIM IS ON THAT 16-INCH SCREEN. THE REST IS INVISIBLE.

Peter (who requested that his last name not be used) pushes consequences from his mind and ignores what he knows will happen if this continues unchecked. The game is getting the best of him. His grades are plummeting, his social life evaporating before his bleary, bloodshot eyes. His friends are becoming concerned. At first their remarks are tongue-in-cheek. *Dude, maybe you need rehab*, they joke. But eventually they get serious. They often visit his room and find him hunched over a desk, or in his bed, torpid and detached. They urge him to stop, to put down the laptop and give it up. And Peter—a soft-spoken 18-year-old from Omaha who never played so much as a full round of *Super Mario Bros.* as a kid—wants to quit. He does. He just can't.

Twice he tries to kick the habit. The first time, he and a friend make a pact. They uninstall the game from their computers and vow together to say goodbye to the *Warcraft* world for good. But then, just a few days later, the computer lures him back, and almost by muscle memory, he finds himself reinstalling.

Feeling desperate, he tries setting up parental controls to shield himself from the game's reach, but Peter finds a way around that too. He is powerless. Unlike traditional video games, which can be won and tossed aside, *Warcraft* is an open-ended MMORPG—a massively multiplayer online role-playing game with *no* end, which makes Peter's condition similar to, say, compulsive gambling.

By early December, Peter's parents receive his grades. He's failed every class but one, and they decide he won't be returning to college in the spring. Instead, one month later, Peter finds himself in Fall City, Wash., at a place called reSTART, America's first and only in-patient rehab center dedicated exclusively to Internet and gaming addiction. It's the beginning of a 45-day journey, and the hope is that Peter will never be the same.

Cosette Rae had met young men and women like Peter before, all part of the 12.5 percent of American adults who exhibit some sign of potential Internet addiction, according to a 2006 Stanford University study. In her work as a private practice clinical social worker in Fall City for more than a decade, Rae encountered a growing number of her own patients who she believed were Internet addicts. They'd struggled for years to overcome their increasing dependency on everything from online role-playing games to social networking sites—marriages were falling apart, professional responsibilities were being ignored, and ambitions were shriveling. Rae realized she had nowhere to send these patients for the type of recovery she believed they required.

Less than 15 miles away in the town of Redmond, Dr. Hilarie Cash was facing a similar dilemma. She'd been studying and treating Internet addiction since 1994, and 10 years ago she co-founded Internet/Computer Addiction Services, an outpatient program that addressed this uncharted 21st-century affliction head-on. But she found this sometimes wasn't enough to combat the magnitude of the disorder. Some patients needed a fully dedicated rehabilitation experience, a place where they could unplug from the Web for a while, rewire their withering minds, and reconnect with the real world.

Rae started researching the topic in early 2009 and found Cash. In the course of a few short weeks they drew up the plans for reSTART, and by July they had their first group of patients.

The center, operated out of Rae's bright, expansive home in Fall City, is nestled 26 miles east of Seattle in Washington's cozy Snoqualmie Valley. Surrounded by five thickly wooded acres, reSTART can accommodate up to six patients at a time. A large country kitchen connects two sunken living rooms, one of which opens into a recreation nook with a piano, several guitars, and shelves overflowing with books, magazines, and board games. Sunshine spills into almost every corner, bathing the rustic decor and cozy couches in light. And there's not a computer in sight.

At the moment, the center's four patients are being treated primarily for online gaming addiction, though each of them has also experienced trouble unplugging from the Internet in general. Obsessive online gaming is just one way in which Internet dependence manifests itself; there have been, and will be, patients seeking out reSTART for other related problems. Unstoppable social networking binges. Unending instant messaging sessions with dozens of strangers that spiral into the wee hours. Right now, though, the promise of recovery from gaming addiction is the center's biggest draw.

Days begin at 7:30 a.m. Patients take turns preparing breakfast, performing household chores and breaking off for personal reflection. Then they move on to addiction recovery work, which includes individual and group therapy sessions designed to help patients think critically about their co-dependence on the Internet while discovering ways to combat its hold on their lives. A typical afternoon comprises wellness exercises—everything from basketball and soccer, to cardio workouts, strength training, and yoga sessions—and

CHINA, WHICH BOASTS THE WORLD'S LARGEST ONLINE POPULATION AT MORE THAN 384 MILLION PEOPLE, HAS DECLARED IT TO BE ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST PRESSING PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS; IN 2008, CHINA BECAME THE FIRST COUNTRY TO CLASSIFY INTERNET ADDICTION AS A REAL DISORDER.

occasional field trips to enjoy the beauty of the local landscape. The day closes with a family-style dinner, personal free time, and "mindfulness training."

It's important to Rae that the center doesn't feel like a hospital. "We wanted it to be structured like life," she says. "They forget what it's like to have face-to-face contact. To see the movement of someone's eyes, to hear the inflection in someone's voice, to be together and laughing and talking and eating."

Nature plays a critical role in the therapy here. Counseling sessions are often held in either a fully furnished cottage or tree house, accessed by walking across a short suspension bridge like something straight out of Tolkien. There's also a 300-foot zip line, a rock wall, an organic garden and two playful goats that leap with elation whenever someone walks past their pen.

This Elysian setting, of course, comes with a price tag. Patients pay $14,500 to stay at reSTART for the full 45 days, and since Internet addiction is not recognized by the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*), insurance doesn't cover the cost. Rae and Cash realize this probably prohibits many from seeking the help they need, but that's just one more reason to spread awareness about this serious and growing problem. The latest edition of the *DSM* identifies substance abuse by one or more of the following criteria: a failure to fulfill major obligations; continued use despite physical hazards; frequent legal problems; and recurrent social or interpersonal difficulties. According to reSTART's co-founders, each item on the checklist applies to the patients enrolled at their retreat.

Peter, now more than halfway through his stay at the center, would agree. "Logically, I knew school was more important," he recalls. "But somehow my brain was able to override that and tell me, 'No, gaming is more important now.'"

Professional recognition of Internet addiction is clearly on the rise. China, which boasts the world's largest online population at more than 384 million people, has declared it to be one of the country's most pressing public health concerns; in 2008, China became the first country to classify Internet addiction as a real disorder. Academic studies, including the Stanford study cited above, suggest it is a pressing problem in the States

as well. Cash has heard that a forthcoming edition of the *DSM* will include non-chemical addiction, and she hopes that umbrella covers Internet addiction. Still, it may be quite some time before American society views the disorder in the same light as alcoholism or drug abuse. "I've not often encountered a clinician who thought I was off the wall," Cash says, "but in print, in terms of what I read, or responses to things written, there will be people who will take that position. And I know it's a very common postion."

But the stories of the reSTART patients mirror those of any other addict. Jessica is a slight, withdrawn, remarkably shy 28-year-old who has been rehabilitating at reSTART for nearly six weeks. She avoids eye contact as she sits on the couch, flipping through a coffee-table magazine. She doesn't seem to be reading a word on its pages. She flips front to back, slowly and silently, then back to front, repeating the pattern several times. She struggles to tell her story, which includes about seven years lost to the world of Internet games like *Travel Wars* and *Renaissance Kingdoms*. She lost jobs because she was up too late playing and would sleep through the morning. She stopped going out with "real friends," and she stopped doing things she loved, like playing the violin or riding her favorite horse.

When asked if she thinks "addiction" is an accurate word to describe what she was—what she *is*—going through, Jessica pauses. "I think it is," she finally says. "For me, when I was away from the computer I'd be thinking about the computer, and there'd be almost a physical pulling sensation toward the computer."

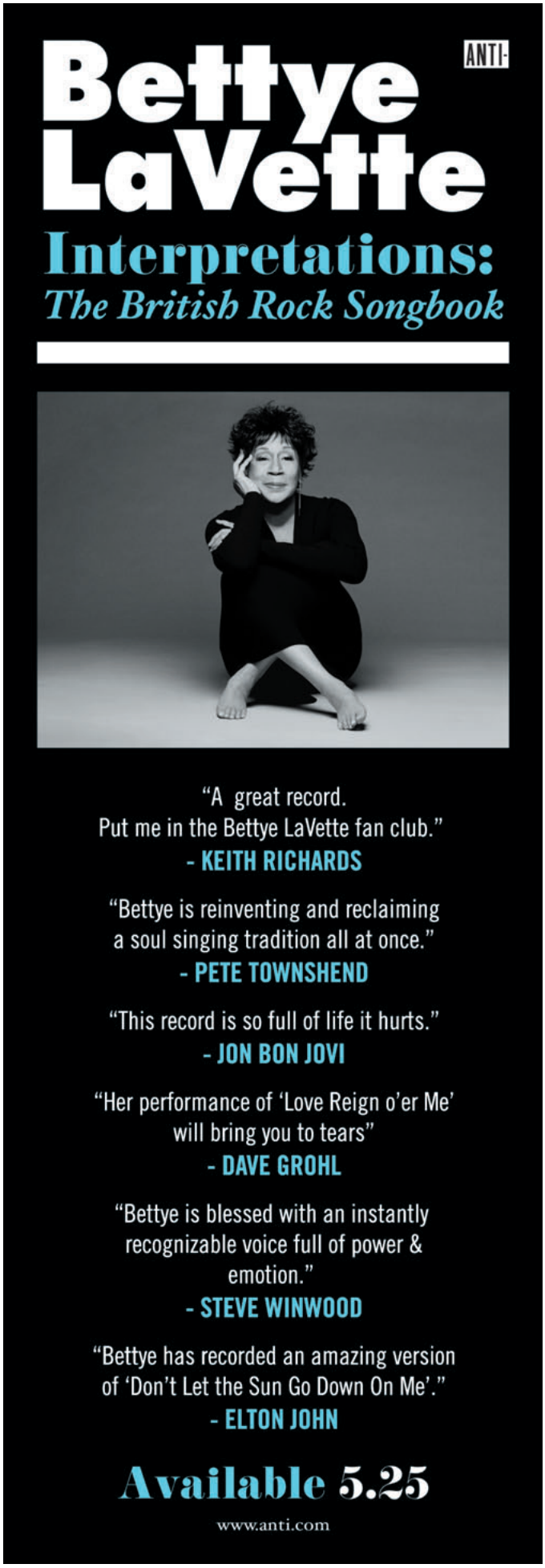
Brad is just three days away from going home. He's been recovering at reSTART for almost seven weeks now, ever since his therapist back in Georgia suggested he seek help. At 25, Brad's story is similar to Peter's and Jessica's. Thousands of hours wasted on *Warcraft*; college classes neglected to the point of failure. But that's all in the past now. He's eager to get back to his friends, he says. Eager to finally put his business degree to good use. Eager to live the life he knows he's capable of living.

But Brad's return to the world outside of reSTART, like so many who leave here, is also fraught with anxiety. "Yeah, I'm nervous. I'm extremely nervous," he says. "It could be the same fucked-up situation I was in before I got here." He pauses. "It almost gives you a nervous twitch just thinking about it."

Coming home from reSTART isn't like coming home from most other rehabs. When a drug addict returns to everyday life, his vice can mostly be avoided. When a man declines a cocktail and says he's in AA, people understand it. But when a college student comes home from reSTART and says he can't play *World of Warcraft* because he's a recovering Internet addict? That's something else.

Sitting next to Brad on one of the living room couches, Peter ponders his return to everyday life. Soon his parents will fly out, pick him up and take him home to Omaha. He'll be returning to college in the fall, this time without *Warcraft*. Nonetheless, he knows he'll be faced with temptation and that intense lure of a game that once threatened to ruin his life.

"I need total abstinence," Peter says. "If I start playing again I will slowly, without realizing it, end up in the same place." *Fin*


Bettye LaVette
ANTI-
Interpretations:
The British Rock Songbook
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- PETE TOWNSHEND
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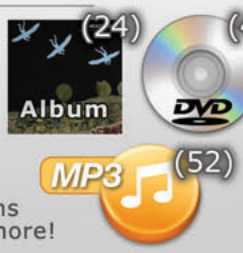

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THE PASTE RECKONING

CAN YOU DIG IT? ➥ 88

ILLUSTRATION BY **MARK WEAVER**

RATINGS GUIDE: **0 to 2.9** REGRETTABLE | **3 to 4.9** FORGETTABLE | **5 to 6.9** RESPECTABLE | **7 to 8.9** COMMENDABLE | **9 to 10** PHENOMENAL

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PARTY'S OVER

James Murphy's powerhouse funtime band goes out on top BY RACHAEL MADDUX

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

This Is Happening

EMI/DFA

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Over the course of four full-length albums and a smattering of singles, LCD Soundsystem—the oft-one-man-show of New York DJ, producer and DFA Records co-honcho James Murphy—has become an increasingly sure bet. But it wasn't always so. His first single was 2002's "Losing My Edge," an eight-minute takedown of rock 'n' roll posturing ("I used to work in the record store / I had everything before anyone") that was almost more notable in scope and subject matter than for its musicality. When LCD's self-titled debut came out three years later, lead single "Daft Punk is Playing at My House" toyed with hipster braggadocio in much the same way and became the album's—and the band's—big hook. Murphy seemed like some kind of schlubby Nerd King, weirdly cool despite himself, lording over his turntables in a hoodie and button-down.

But LCD Soundsystem avoided novelty-act territory with a helping of self-skewering; Murphy dressed himself down almost more than anyone else, stripping away all traces of preening entitlement and pretense, readying himself for a four-album run that would build on—not trade on—his cutting wit. The records have a wry take on certain social graces, toying with the kids packing underground bars and the same kind of house parties that probably wound up blasting the songs. "It's like a discipline / Without the discipline of all of the discipline / It's like a fat guy in a T-shirt / Doing all the saying," he sang on "Movement," from *LCD Soundsystem*, which

sounded just like the throwdowns it mocked, all loose, slappy beats and whomping synths. Two years later, *Sound of Silver* tightened, brightened and focused those same elements; Murphy sounded more sure of himself, too, but wearier. He elbow-rubbed with the kids on "North American Scum," but tracks like "Someone Great" and "All My Friends" saw him stretching out his lower back on the sidelines.

He was drifting away from the scene and into his own head, which is mostly where *This Is Happening* finds him—and which, as it turns out, is as fun as any club. LCD Soundsystem has always been tagged as dance music, but that's only ever been partly true; here, from the opening song, that demarcation is further confounded. "Dance Yrself Clean" shuffles out as an ostensibly low-key track, with insouciant, pattering drums and Murphy singing about shitty friends. A tweedling keyboard rolls in, and what sounds like a can of nails rattles gently as the song putts along until the three-minute mark, when an explosion of jackhammering synth and drums blasts clear through the chill haze. You can move your body any which way for the next six minutes, assuming you can scrape your brains off the floor. The song winds back down to its unassuming beginnings just in time for second track "Drunk Girls" to come kicking through the doors; it's the album's first single and more reminiscent of LCD's best-known early songs in its jumpy take on nightlife shenanigans, but its manic energy and swelling, "Oh, oh, oh! / I believe in waking up together" chorus makes it sound like one last hurrah for old times' sake before heading home to leftovers and Netflix.

Make no mistake: Murphy and his crew are fully committed to this album. There's a remarkable sustained energy to this collection; its electronic textures thrum and shimmy, and wall after sonic wall is built up and torn down with impeccable precision. But there's an odd tension throughout; Murphy sounds both all-in and like he's keeping one eye on the exit—in no small part, surely, because he intends this album to be LCD Soundsystem's last. It's not a swan-song, exactly—that would require some degree of sentimentality and forced closure that seems wholly absent from Murphy's world—but it's deliberate and no-nonsense; he doesn't want to waste his time, or yours, or anyone's. Maybe he senses he's in danger of eventually outstaying his welcome, becoming the kind of artist of whom people say things like, "Yeah, he kind of just does that one thing, but I like that one thing." That "one thing," of course, would be a hundred tiny things (picking his favorite parts of electronica and house and punk and pop and soul and splicing it all into his own wryly syncopated vision, affixed with a healthy bit of brattiness). While it's certainly still working for him now—*This Is Happening* is, in all respects, LCD's best album—it doesn't take much to imagine the act becoming a tired gag a couple more albums down the line.

Murphy sounds both all-in and like he's keeping one eye on the exit—in no small part, surely, because he intends this album to be LCD Soundsystem's last.

For now, though, we get a handful of parting gifts: The insistently lovelorn "Change," featuring Murphy's most oddly sophisticated vocal delivery to date; the percolating piss and vinegar of "Hit" and its record industry shrug-off; the skittering, spoken-word discourse, snide asides and comic-book chorus of "Pow Pow." It'll be a shame to see LCD Soundsystem go—but you know, the coolest kids always ditch the party early.

9.3

➥ RACHAEL MADDUX IS *PASTE*'S ASSOCIATE EDITOR. HER MUSIC COLUMN, LISTEN UP, APPEARS EVERY MONDAY ON PASTEMAGAZINE.COM

Photo by Ruwan Wijesooriya

AMERICAN APPEAL

Iconic rocker is just himself, and that's enough

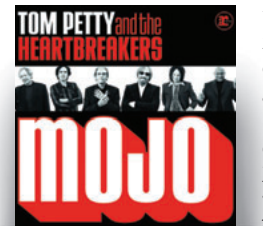
BY STEVE DOLLAR

TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS

Mojo

WARNER BROS.

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 15



Tom Petty, who turns 60 this year, has reached a glorious yet potentially complicated stage in his career. He's got the box sets. He's in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He's recorded countless pop smashes. His band, the Heartbreakers, stands as one of America's indisputably great working musical ensembles. As he begins his fifth decade on stage, what exactly is left for Petty to do?

Mojo suggests he's not sweating the question. The album may be the loosest of his career, an unfussy, shuffle-mode assortment of blues-infused jams and steel guitar-haunted ballads that abandon the structural perfection that shaped his canon, from "American Girl" to "Free Falling" and onward. This isn't quite a 101 proof bourbon-and-boogie record, but the Gainesville, Fla. native has never had so much fun digging on his roots in the dirty South. Recorded live with no overdubs, *Mojo* is music made by a road-tested gang that sounds as if it just hopped off the tour bus and plugged in.

The title calls to mind Muddy Waters' "Got My Mojo Working," and opener "Jefferson Jericho Blues" also conjures the essence of McKinley Morganfield, with lusty harmonica, clip-clopping drums and rippling keys shoring up Petty's knowing, put-on vocals. It's soon apparent that this is as much guitarist Mike Campbell's project as it is Petty's; nearly every tune is an occasion for the axeman to flex his muscles. "First Flash of Freedom," which Campbell co-wrote, looms as a likely staple of Petty's now-in-progress summer tour. As the song develops, Campbell's high, flickering, single-note lines play against the low simmer of Benmont Tench's organ grooves. It's a nod to the Allman Brothers Band, with the lyrical, slow-burning fuse of an improvisatory elegy like "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed." Petty could be thinking about the 1960s, or just feeling nostalgic for lost youth, when he sings about a "Fistful of glory / A suitcase of sand." Of course, the man can still deliver a fine romantic reverie—on "No Reason To Cry," he sings about wishing to "See the sun color your hair / And see the tall grass blow."

The album isn't organized around an abiding message or theme aside from what's readily obvious—the blues—but the band tries to evoke as many sides of the genre as possible. "Candy" is a jokey shuffle in which Petty declares his distaste for turnip greens, pronouncing the word "toy-nup" as if he were an 80-something jazz cat chilling on porch steps in *Treme*; the lazy, Don Williams-influenced beat and Petty's vocal cornpone are a great combination. Elsewhere, he takes on a mean woman in "I Should Have Known It," a pure exercise in Zeppelin-style swagger, especially when Campbell connects with his inner Jimmy Page. The album's sole flaw is "Don't Pull Me Over," Petty's forgettable stab at reggae.

The Gainesville, Fla. native has never had so much fun digging on his roots in the dirty South.

Through it all, Petty celebrates a certain kind of all-American romantic spirit—a fearlessness and a desire to embrace the moment without regrets. Damn the torpedoes and all of that. So it's fitting that *Mojo* closes with its best lines, which speak for the album itself:

You're barefoot in the grass
And you're chewin' sugar cane
You gotta little buzz on
You're kissin' in the rain
And if a day like this
don't ever come again
Well, that's good enough.

8.0

Photo by Sam Jones

BETTYE LAVETTE

Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook

ANTI-

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The British Invasion returns to its R&B roots

For the last few decades, Bettye LaVette has sung with the kind raw force that makes each word sound like a knife's being pulled from her side. She mostly performs straight-ahead soul, but she's tackled covers by Willie Nelson and Ray Charles on previous releases, which means *Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook* is hardly uncharted territory. She doesn't just cover The Beatles, Pink Floyd, The Who, Led Zeppelin and more—she wholly re-imagines the songs. On Elton John's "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me," she summons a kind of defiant nerve that Sir Elton himself could never muster, stripping down the instrumentation and relying instead on her ferocious pipes. And on Paul McCartney's "Maybe I'm Amazed," she transforms a sunny, grandiose pop song into a dark and desperate tale of devotion, paring down the sprawling guitar and drawling the main refrain. She occasionally indulges in vocal gymnastics just because she can, but LaVette's voice revitalizes transcendent lyrics that many of today's top female singers wouldn't be able to handle. **SARA LIBBY** 7.6

JASON MORAN AND THE BANDWAGON

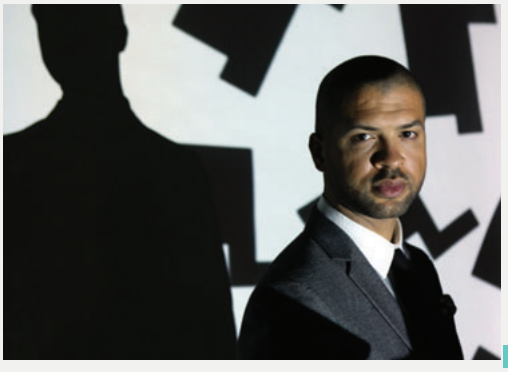
TEN

BLUE NOTE

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

Then is now

As both a thinker and an entertainer, pianist Jason Moran has enjoyed a high profile as a jazz artist in the era critic Gary Giddins once defined as "post-jazz." The 35-year-old Houston native has expertly fused tradition and experimentation, tying together both ends of the jazz century in lively tunes that deploy stride technique and hip-hop rhythm with a sly sensibility. *TEN* celebrates Moran's decade in the major leagues. Fueled by the expert bustle of his trio (including bassist Tarus Mateen and drummer Nasheet Waits), he's given to expansive, sparkling showpieces; solo, he coaxes the still spaces between the notes into a cadence of their own. Homages to everyone from Thelonious Monk to Conlon Nancarrow abound, but the best is paid to Jaki Byard. On his mentor's "To Bob Vatel of Paris," Moran cuts loose with a rippling stride display—its sass and wit argue for the form's vitality, no matter the era. **STEVE DOLLAR** 8.1



WOLF PARADE

Expo 86

SUB POP

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 29

Marching on

Wolf Parade's third studio LP attempts to straddle the ghostly and mesmerizing pop of their stellar debut *Apologies to the Queen Mary* and the sprawling, fuzzed-out prog of followup *At Mount Zoomer*. The Montreal quartet is mostly successful in this balancing act, delivering a handful of thematically-obtuse pop missiles heavy on reverb and guitar, with trademark synths still lurking low in the mix. There's plenty of *Queen Mary*-esque verve and vigor; "Palm Road" is a delightfully skuzzy guitar-rocker buoyed by straight-outta-DEVO Casio lines, and "Pobody's Nerfect" is Wolf Parade in fighting trim—a cacophony of gritty guitar, Moog, rumbling drums and crashing cymbals. Occasionally things get a little too wacky ("I had a vision of a gorilla / And he was a killer, a killer!" co-frontman Spencer Krug yelps on rollicking closer "Cave-O-Sapien") but you can hardly fault the band. Their weirdness is eminently infectious and, as always, theirs' alone. **MICHAEL SABA** 8.3

DELOREAN

Subiza

TRUE PANTHER/MATADOR/ MUSHROOM PILLOW

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Disappointing dance doldrums

The latest offering from Barcelona electro-sunshine quartet Delorean is certainly danceable—house piano, handclaps and a jungle of synths suggest the bliss of the late-night summer parties they could easily soundtrack—but the album's homogeneous vocals are too often reminiscent of other acts—specifically, Animal Collective's harmonic structure. The mood and tempo don't show much range either. By the time the glowstick-dance jam of third track "Grow" kicks in, the heavily layered synth that permeates *Subiza*, which at first seemed lush, begins to feel like the sticky, over-saturated air of the tropics after a downpour. The less-embellished "Simple Graces" offers some relief, but it fails to break the album's well established mid-tempo, mid-range cadence. You could listen to virtually any club-ready dance number and glean everything that Delorean's 42-minute exercise has to offer. **RACHEL BAILEY** 4.9

SCHOOL OF SEVEN BELLS

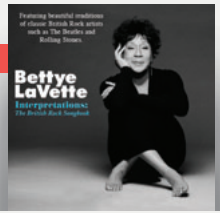
Disconnect From Desire

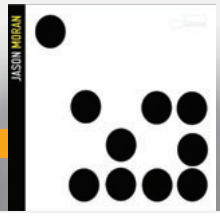
VAGRANT

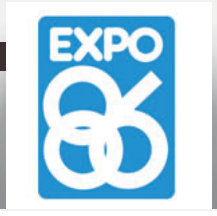
RELEASE DATE: JULY 13

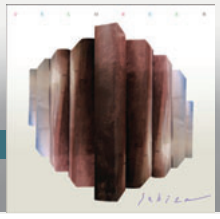
Nostalgia done right

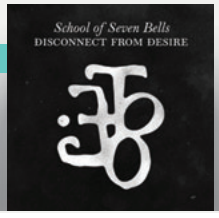
The only thing more difficult than telling someone you're in love with them is telling someone that you used to be in love with them. On "I L U," from School of Seven Bells' sophomore LP, the psychedelic trio does just that, employing crystalline vocals textured with background sighs. The album runs the dream-pop gamut, from dizzyingly energetic to loopy and surreal. Lead track "Windstorm" kicks the album open, winding into the equally charged "Heart is Strange." But *Disconnect From Desire*'s lows are just as addicting as its highs. Synths and bells make slower songs like "Joviann" and closer "The Wait" pulse pleasantly, and repeated phrases like "I used to love"—a cornerstone of more than one track—amp up the nostalgia. Each track is a dynamic whirlwind; together, they're captivating. **ANI VRABEL** 8.2











Jason Moran photo by Clay Patrick McBride

RHYMEFEST

El Che

DNBE ENTERTAINMENT
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

A handful of hits from Chi City

On Che Smith's second Rhymefest full-length, he showcases the lyrical precision and rhythmic diversity that won him a Grammy for co-writing "Jesus Walks" with fellow Chicago native Kanye West. "City is Fallen" is all molasses brass and smooth jazz, while the drum-and-808 throbs of "Give It To Me" could rattle a root cellar; meanwhile, his verses slide between snide ("Shoulda hollered at him when he was young and hot / You'll never have what Michelle Obama's got") and passionate ("Fighting off contentment, I have a long way to go"). But *El Che* is all about Rhymefest the rapper, not Rhymefest the writer ("Wrote some Kanye records / Next Grammy's just mine / This is El Che's record," he raps on "Talk My Shit") and the disc suffers for it. Though prolific with tracks and mixtapes, Smith still hasn't mastered the LP form; though excellent, this feels more like a discombobulated collection of singles than a cohesive album. **7.9**

ANNA SWINDLE

SUN KIL MOON

Admiral Fell Promises

CALDO VERDE RECORDS
RELEASE DATE: JULY 13

Beautiful rambling

For Mark Kozelek, old ghosts die hard. The man behind Sun Kil Moon has always had a complicated relationship with the specters of his past, and on *Admiral Fell Promises*, he once again mines his memory and crafts an ode to lost loves, death and listlessness. Kozelek is an adept storyteller, always toeing the thin emotional line between hope and hopelessness; even at his brightest, a lingering sadness surrounds him like relentless fog. *Admiral*'s melodies—most notably on the title track and "Alesund"—are heavy and gorgeous, heartbreaking and breathtaking. Still, they're marred by Kozelek's indulgence in instrumental meandering—while it often suits his introspective bent, he's not at his best here. *Admiral* lacks the strong, emotional storyline of 2008's *April* and retraces too many of his past musical steps. It's a beautiful, melancholy snapshot of a musician dealing with his past, but he's taken this picture before. **7.3**

LIZ STINSON

GRACE POTTER & THE NOCTURNALS

Grace Potter & the Nocturnals

HOLLYWOOD
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

She wants to lead the glamorous life

Once a rootsy, crunchy outfit with pronounced Muscle Shoals influences, Grace Potter & The Nocturnals broke out of Vermont through performances at blues fests, hippie jams and Bonnaroo, powered by a siren-voiced knockout who echoed Bonnie Raitt and could really throw down on the Hammond B3. So when word came in spring 2009 that the band was recording with T-Bone Burnett, Potter and The Nocturnals' ascent into modern country-rock royalty seemed imminent.

But something funny happened on the way to this slender fourth album: T-Bone was replaced by producer Mark Batson (Dr. Dre, Jay-Z, Dave Matthews Band), the band's lineup was shuffled and their soulful, groove-based sound somehow became glammed-out pop-rock.

While not quite an extreme makeover, the 13 tracks from Potter's new-look Nocturnals are swathed in a pop-metallic sheen, methodical background vocals and lots of cooing where there used to be swanky soul. The record shifts to a later part of Potter's beloved '70s, and the commercial play could only feel more calculated if it featured a Drake cameo. Heavy on the breathing, lipstick and Betty Boop squeaks, opener "Paris (Ooh La La)" sets the LP's tone as Potter howls over a synthetic groove; "Tiny Light," one of six Potter/Batson co-writes, sounds pre-approved for a scene of great importance on *Gossip Girl*, and the piano-driven rave-up "Hot Summer Night" is laden with palpable effort and Potter's clunky lines ("Even though it's the middle of the winter and it's really bad weather").

There are hints of the band's previous life here—"Oasis" seems to strikes the roots-pop balance they're going for, and "Goodbye Kiss" is perfectly fine barroom reggae—and Potter rarely misses a chance to show off her killer voice, but The Nocturnals' crucial swagger has sadly been scrubbed clean away. **5.8**

JEFF VRABEL

Photo by Adrien Broom

PAUL WELLER

Wake Up the Nation

YEP ROC

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 1

A wake-up call from the godfather

"Get your face outta Facebook and turn off the phone," Paul Weller commands on his 10th solo album, *Wake Up the Nation*. From any other artist entering his third decade in rock 'n' roll, such an imperative would likely sound more than a touch curmudgeonly. But coming from The Jam's head rabble-rouser and The Style Council's main sophisticate, the line becomes a battle cry, and Weller is prepared to lead by example. As he enters his 50s, Weller has softened neither his music nor his ambitions, and *Nation* proves to be his most invigorated and wide-ranging album in years. The songs brim with surly ideas, from the bombastic soundtrack rock of "Aim High" and the shape-shifting suite "Trees" to the mod hip-shake of "Grasp & Still Connect." It's boisterous and often too busy, but never boring. All punks should age this well. **8.0**

STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

MARY GAUTHIER

The Foundling

RAZOR & TIE

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Lost and found

Mary Gauthier is a natural-born yarn-spinner, and her latest album—an autobiographical account of childhood abandonment and failed reconciliation—is quintessential Gauthier: tender and pained, yet ultimately harmonious. The subject matter is gloomy, but warm acoustic melodies and her grainy twang offer an inescapable charm. The title track plays like a mournful French cabaret; meanwhile, on "Mama Here, Mama Gone," lonely piano notes reinforce Gauthier's tale of being "orphaned in limbo" by her mother at "St. Vincent's Infants Home." On "March 11, 1962," 48-year old Gauthier plays out her side of a telephone conversation with her long-estranged birth mother: "You say that you love me, but I'm a secret you can't tell." On *The Foundling*, the songwriter's pain is the listener's prize. **7.5**

DAN HYMAN

SIA

We Are Born

MONKEY PUZZLE/JIVE

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

Barely breathing

Sia must be eager to distance herself from "Breathe Me," the wounded piano meditation made famous by *Six Feet Under*. Though a far cry from her mid-tempo Muzak of 2008, fifth studio LP *We Are Born* is as mild-tempered as most '90s Top 40 pop, lacking the sexual innuendo and oomph of her label Jive Records' past luminaries. Too-brief forays into disco ("You've Changed") and pop rock ("Bring Night" and "Stop Trying") would have benefited from collaborators other than Strokes guitarist Nick Valensi and The Bird and the Bee's Greg Kurstin; "Clap Your Hands" is a tamer version of any given Rapture track, and "Hurting Me Now" sounds like a Lily Allen B-side. Sia's ostensible rebirth falls apart once *We Are Born* detours to bleak balladry with "I'm In Here," a pale imitation of her big claim to fame. **5.0**

CHRISTINA LEE

DEER TICK

The Black Dirt Sessions

PARTISAN RECORDS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Intimations of mortality

After two albums of wily, adolescent country, Rhode Island's Deer Tick hits adulthood—and all the heartbreak and fear of mortality that comes with it—hard on these ragged, shadowy ballads. John McCauley III's fiberglass croak couldn't sound further from Neil Young's whimper, but *The Black Dirt Sessions* is this band's *After the Goldrush*, stuffed with devastating songs laid bare by weathered, redemption-seeking renegades. In the brooding "Twenty Miles," McCauley howls, "If you've lost your way, I'm seeing you through" with my-time-here-is-limited angst; crawling piano dirge "Goodbye, Dear Friend" is hauntingly intimate ("You carry on ... in the unmade bed you slept in, where I laid you down to rest one last time"). Only swamp-rocker "Mange" quickens the pace. *Dirt* is pensive, painful stuff, tougher than leather and rawer than a bleeding steak—but that's life, right? **8.2**

JUSTIN JACOBS

SAMANTHA CRAIN

You (Understood)

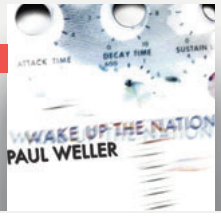
RAMSEUR RECORDS

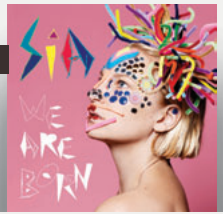
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Unbalanced memories

On her sophomore full-length release, Oklahoma-based singer/songwriter Samantha Crain takes an 11-song glance over her young shoulder, each track the result of an interaction with a particular person, time and place. Not surprisingly, *You (Understood)* isn't exactly cohesive, scurrying from the wistful bounce of "Blueprints" to fuzzed-out guitars on broken-heart anthem "Two-Sidedness," but Crain more than compensates with sheer earnestness. Like a prairie-bred, meat-and-potatoes Joanna Newsom, Crain's vocals are quivering, emotive and visceral. They shine when layered over the sparse beauty of "We Are the Same," but fall a bit short when fighting through the guitar licks and wonky time signatures of "Toothpicks." *You (Understood)* is a musical scrapbook of memories—the snapshots are just a little out-of-focus. **7.3**

LIZ STINSON





Paul Weller photo by Dean Chalkley

WELCOME TO JAMPOP

Two heavyweights leave their egos at the door

BY MARK KROTOV

NAS AND DAMIAN MARLEY

Distant Relatives

UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Read enough pre-release commentary, and you might begin to think that *Distant Relatives*, Nas and Damian Marley's new collaborative album, is unprecedented, transformative, and revelatory—not because it features great music, but merely because it exists. And it's not just Universal's press kit doing the talking: During an on-stage discussion at the Grammy Museum last year, Nas and Marley made clear that this would be an entirely new and unique record. And last December, the National Geographic Society hosted a panel in D.C. about the diverse roots of hip-hop, with *Relatives* as the event's focal point.

All this talk is tossed aside by the album itself, which very rarely sounds "important" and mostly just sounds like a lot of fun. *Relatives* finds Marley and Nas in surprisingly humble form; at this point, the multiplatinum Queensbridge rap giant and the multi-talented, Grammy Award-winning son of Bob can sell out anything from amphitheaters to, well, panel discussions. But there's very little ego evident on an album that could easily have had double the dosage. Even more unexpectedly, Nas seems perfectly content to let Marley take the reins; the latter gets more verses and handles all-important production duties with his brother Stephen.

Nas and Marley first collaborated on "Road To Zion," from Marley's 2005 album, *Welcome to Jamrock*. Though most of the song's vocals were Marley's, "Zion" sounded a lot like a Nas track—eerie, atmospheric, minor key. But aside from the occasional handclap (the perfect accompaniment to Nas' breathy, urgent delivery) *Relatives* lacks much of the rapper's sonic signature; instead, we get plenty of reggae, Afrobeat-inspired percussion, keyboards, and Marley's programming—some elegant, some excessive.

"As We Enter," the album's opening (and best) track, is a case study in flawless collaboration; it offers up as *Distant Relatives*' first sound a horn sample that evokes Fela Kuti or a Bernard Herrmann film score—an expansive tune rooted in Afrobeat tradition, which seems just right for these two, who make quite clear their interest in the links between the genres. From there, the two emcees trade rhymes (Nas: "Real revolutionary rhymers" / Marley: "Rhythm piranhas" / Nas: "Like two Obamas / Unfold the drama") over a pulsing beat and the occasional chant. It's a song at once fiery and generous.

> There's very little ego evident on an album that could easily have had double the dosage.

The mournful "Wisdom" is another highlight that stays true to African music (it features a prominent sample from Amadou & Mariam's "Sabali") without feeling bound by it. The original song, after all, was produced by Damon Albarn: Surrounded by Marley's soulful flow, the sample sounds like something straight out of Bollywood.

It's not all bliss; at a few points, Marley's programming feels overbearing and slick, and it's hard not to imagine how the album would have sounded with more live instrumentation, which managed to give even Jay-Z's curmudgeonly "Death of Autotune" such incredible immediacy. And on an album devoted to African musical history and crafted by two connoisseurs, a backing band would not have seemed at all out of place. It's also unclear whether Lil Wayne's guest verse on "My Generation" is earnest ("A generation led by a black President / Now how's that for change?") or just phoned in ("Man I gotta keep it moving / To the beat of my drum").

Still, this is a solid, serious collection of songs—the product of two thoughtful and ambitious musicians—and an album that doesn't need a panel discussion to establish its importance.

7.9

Photo by Nabil Elderkin

HERE WE GO MAGIC

Pigeons

SECRETLY CANADIAN

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Here we go again

It's been an especially fruitful year for Luke Temple. Since the psych-folk singer re-branded himself as Here We Go Magic in 2009, he's released a self-titled debut, gained four band members, toured with The Walkmen and fellow Brooklynites Grizzly Bear and crafted a follow-up, *Pigeons*. The music is richer, more atmospheric and stranger than ever. This sophomore release is more collaborative than his debut, but the main aesthetic—electro-ambience buoyed by airy, dreamlike vocals—remains the same. With Temple's sleepy voice, songs like "F.F.A.P." and "Casual" sound like distorted bedside lullabies. Though *Pigeons* feels at times like the noisy, circuitous soundtrack to a yoga retreat, the frontman does just enough to keep things lively: "Old World United" and jaunty lead single "Collector" both represent a curious cross-section of Matt & Kim and Beach House. For all of Temple's artful ambition, his catchy choruses and dance-ready beats give this album its pulse. **JEREMY MEDINA** 7.3

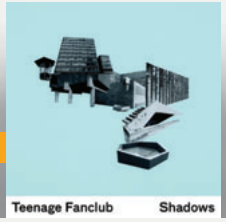
TEENAGE FANCLUB

Shadows

MERGE

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Long-running Scots deliver more pop purity



Even after two decades as a band, it has to be intimidating when Teenage Fanclub's Norman Blake brings in another hook-laden pop masterpiece, and then Gerard Love or Raymond McGinley have to offer something that matches up. Like a world-class pitching rotation, nobody wants to be the guy to give up all the runs and blow a winning streak. And so nothing about *Shadows*, the band's 10th outing (and eighth since *Bandwagonesque*, the grunge-era classic that briefly turned the Big Star-loving Scots into flavors-of-the-month), should surprise longtime fans of their impeccable craftsmanship. If the album has a weakness, it's too much sedate, midtempo consistency and not enough power in the power-pop; many tracks blur together, and the production ensures that tasty instrumental moments—like the multi-guitar outro on "The Back Of My Mind" and the violin on "Dark Clouds"—don't really stand out. Still, the pop landscape is littered with folks who wish they could deliver one or two tracks as good as the dozen found here. **REID DAVIS** 7.0

MACY GRAY

The Sellout

CONCORD RECORDS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

Coming (back) on too strong

The problem with Macy Gray's comeback album is that, on it, she talks too much about her comeback album. On tracks like "Lately" she sings, "I am popular, they say I'm pretty, you should come back to me"; another song is titled, quite unsubtly, "The Comeback." It's when she's not obsessing over being "back" that Gray really asserts herself, bouncing between her signature soul-pop groove, stadium rock-stompers and love-struck sing-a-longs. Highlights include the melodic "Let You Win," as lush and laid-back as a lazy spring afternoon, and the beguiling "Still Hurts," on which Motown-style "ooh oohs" echo in the background. But Gray's writing is never as sharp as her lye-scrubbed voice, and though the album is one sustained plea for you to re-acknowledge her existence, a host of guests often overshadow her, from the Ting Tings' distinct inflections on "That Man" to Slash's (yes, Slash's) screaming guitar on "Kissed It." On "Stalker," Gray coos, "Just like the ocean need the water / ... Baby you need me." If she wasn't so hellbent on convincing us, she might be right. **SARA LIBBY** 6.8

TIFT MERRITT
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TIFT MERRITT

See You On The Moon

FANTASY

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 1

Daring to dig deeper

Tift Merritt's first three releases were so solid they seemed calculated; her shifts from alt-country (2002's *Bramble Rose*) to soulful Americana (2004's *Tambourine*) to homespun lo-fi (2008's *Another Country*) were almost too sure-footed to fully capitalize on the aching vulnerability that lay below the surface of nearly every song. Though *See You On The Moon* retains the singer's classic polish, it's her first album to successfully capture the intimate tone of her songwriting. Much of the credit for that goes to producer Tucker Martine (Sufjan Stevens, Laura Veirs, The Decemberists), who drapes her in pedal steel and drowsy trails of electric guitar, highlighting every crack and crease in Merritt's voice. The singer fully inhabits the characters in her songs, whether assuming the role of her grandfather in the heart-wrenching piano ballad "Feel Of The World" or wringing out every weary note in the pleading "All the Reasons We Don't Have to Fight." The result might not be her most accessible album, but it's certainly her most rewarding. **7.6**

MATT FINK

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Eccentric Breaks & Beats

NUMERO GROUP

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Sampled soul collection could be weirder

When Numero Group stumbled on a bootleg megamix composed of two 20-minute patchworks of breaks, loops and vocal fragments gleaned from the label's masterful *Eccentric Soul* collections, it didn't balk. Instead, Numero tracked down the culprits—the production team Shoes—and released their technically-illegal mashup itself. Unfortunately, the mixes aren't quite as curious as the backstory. Too often, the same beats repeat for so uncomfortably long that any new sound is a welcome change. (Though the source material abounds with words and melodies, the only vocals to be found exist in single phrases or solitary moans.) Ultimately, *Breaks & Beats* splices and overlays the gritty, compelling sounds that define so many *Eccentric Soul* albums and stitches them back together with about as much skill as a *Project Runway* reject. The album lays the foundation for what could be a masterfully sampled hip-hop record, but is crying out for the tight rhymes that would complete it. **6.2**

SARA LIBBY

COMING FROM EVIL TEEN RECORDS:

WARREN HAYNES PRESENTS:
THE BENEFIT CONCERT VOLUME 3
JUNE 8
Recorded live at Warren Haynes 13th Annual Christmas Jam on December 21st, 2001
Featuring: Blues Traveler, Drivin' N Cryin', Gov't Mule. Phil Lesh & Friends
With Special Guests: Alvin Youngblood Hart, Audley Freed, Danny Barnes, Dave Schools, Edwin McCain, Jimmy Herring, Oteil Burbridge, Robert Randolph

WARREN HAYNES PRESENTS:
THE BENEFIT CONCERT VOLUME 4
JUNE 22
Recorded live at Warren Haynes 14th Annual Christmas Jam on December 21st, 2002
Featuring: Bob Weir & Friends, Gov't Mule, John Hiatt & The Goners, moe., Robert Randolph & The Family Band, Sons of Ralph
With Special Guests: Artimus Pyle, Audley Freed, DJ Logic, Dr. Dan Matrazzo, Edwin McCain, Greg Rzab, Jerry Joseph, John Smith, Kevn Kinney, Mike Barnes

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VARIOUS ARTISTS

Broken Hearts & Dirty Windows: Songs of John Prine

OH BOY

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

At last, the tribute he deserves

The songs of dirt-road troubador John Prine are malleable—simple, elegiac tales of people living out simple lives. They're easy tunes to cover, which means this smartly-assembled tribute album is long overdue. It draws from the legion of neo-folk acolytes Prine has helped shuffle into the spotlight, with the Avett Brothers, My Morning Jacket and the Drive-By Truckers, among others, scribbling the margins of his well-thumbed volumes in their own shorthand. Justin Vernon of Bon Iver welcomes "Bruised Orange (Chain of Sorrow)" into his misty, distant world, and Conor Oberst and the Mystic Valley Band follow up with a ramshackle "Wedding Day in Funeralville." Elsewhere, Old Crow Medicine Show nails the gorgeous, bruising "Angel From Montgomery," Josh Ritter ambles through "Mexican Home" and Jim James hangs his head low on the heartbroken "All The Best," all providing graceful spins on the American experience and Prine's sharpened take on the impossible mess that humans make of it. **JEFF VRABEL** 8.0

VENICE IS SINKING

Sand & Lines: The Georgia Theater Sessions

ONE PERCENT PRESS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 15

An atmospheric tribute to an Athens landmark

Sand & Lines is a haunted album. It was Recorded in Athens' famed Georgia Theatre—and nudged into existence by Theater owner Wilmot "Wil" Greene, who volunteered the venue as studio space—a little more than a year before the venerable music house went up in flames in June 2009. Using Cowboy Junkies' legendary *Trinity Session* as inspiration, the local dream-pop group set up camp around two microphones for four days, holding themselves to a live blueprint with no overdubs or extraneous studio effects. The result is somber, pastoral and startlingly visceral, capturing the careful chaos of their performances; Dense, soaked-wool guitar textures hang in the air over stately trumpets on their cover of Galaxie 500's "Tugboat"; a cover of Dolly Parton's "Jolene" delivers despondent violins, soft harmonies and crashing electric guitar. The Georgia Theatre may be in ashes, but its legacy will echo through the rafters every time this stunning live collection is played. **MATT FINK** 8.1

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Master of crazy-songs lets the crazy master her

BY RACHEL DOVEY

NINA NASTASIA

Outlaster

FATCAT

RELEASE: JUNE 22

Legend has it that Nina Nastasia has never bought a record in her life. Whether or not this is true is irrelevant; like most myths, it highlights an important truth beyond itself—in this case, that the singer/songwriter is practically incomparable to anyone else making music today. She's been compared to everyone from Leonard Cohen to PJ Harvey, but nothing quite fits.

Nastasia's first few albums were thoroughly disconcerting, both musically and lyrically. On her 2000 debut *Dogs* and her much-lauded 2003 release *Run to Ruin*, she dealt heavily in alienation and paranoia—and while this was certainly nothing new in the songwriter-slinging-a-guitar world, she carried these ideas out to their logical conclusion—musical schizophrenia. On

both albums, Nastasia dragged her hapless listeners through the same emotions she sang about, employing minor-key piano crashes, wavering bowed-saw whines and string melodies meandering through her lyrics. Producer Steve Albini, who's helmed all of her albums, captured every crack and tremor in her thin voice, adding to the feeling that Nastasia was powerless in the face of the terror she detailed; it's impossible to settle into a groove and listen passively.

And while her stream-of-consciousness aesthetic was similar to Harvey's (especially on Polly Jean's 1993 album *Rid of Me*, also produced by Albini), the bleakness running through Nastasia's early albums was subtler and more nuanced. Harvey's growling demands of "Lick my legs, I'm on fire" and "Rub it 'till it bleeds" over cacophonous electric crashes would have no place in *Dogs*' nursery-rhyme tinted universe, full of saddle shoes and sandboxes and wishing wells. And that's what makes Nastasia's earlier creations so appealing. She dealt in the domestic and familiar, which made her dark vein of creeping paranoia all the more intriguing. When she suddenly belted "Parachute me down, to that cold, cold undergound" you wanted nothing more than to follow her.

This crawling darkness died down on 2006's *On Leaving*, as Nastasia strummed out lyrics about road tripping and picnicking by lakes; even the haunting "Counting Up Your Bones" dreamily circled a simple chorus. Discontent bubbled below the surface of "Treehouse Song" in a few quick minor piano chords and some ominous drum flourishes, but it seemed that Nastasia's demons had at last settled down and started taking their meds. But on *Outlaster*, her new album, they're back in full force.

It's one thing to craft each song around the idea of discomfort. It's another to make an album so jarring that it feels bipolar. Simple opener "Cry, Cry, Baby" harks back to *On Leaving*; it's tear-soaked enough with its repetitive lament of "You're my own true love / and I know I can't change," but the riffs are balanced and the cellos, while melodramatic, are tethered to the overall melody. Things get weirdly stable on "Moves Away," in which Nastasia sings that now there are "no peely cracks in the walls" or "terror in the sky," her voice melting into the screechy sing-song question of "How long can you last?"

Two tracks later comes "What's Out There," the most paranoid (and downright terrifying—I locked all my doors while listening to it) song of her career.

It's one thing to craft each song around the idea of discomfort. It's another to make an album so jarring that it feels bipolar.

It's a nonsensical, claustrophobic rant in which the familiar domesticity of "a wall, a window, a natty garden turning hotly in the heat" melts away to reveal something "creeping and green, wild and unseen." Every kind of diagnosable neurosis runs wild on this four-minute mess. "Is there anyone like me?" Nastasia pleads, before turning to dystopian horror. "I'd put a mask on before the atmosphere out there could kill me." Meanwhile, violent plucking and orchestral swells push and pull the melody like a churning rip-tide, dying out around the halfway mark as violin squeaks and ambient plinks and taps take over the music like thousands of scaly, suction-toed creatures swarming the narrator's tiny shelter and squirming their way through the cracks. Fittingly, the song ends with violence: "Oh window, window, I have to smash you out." It could hardly be more over-the-top if she screamed Harvey's refrain of "Rub it 'til it bleeds!"

Though *Outlaster* certainly has some beautiful singles ("You're A Holy Man" and the title track, especially) the album stretches too far in either direction; trying to encompass both naïve optimism and full-on straightjacket crazy. Maybe Nastasia's gotten tired of her nuanced tales, or maybe this album is an even more post-modern take on the real effects of mental imbalance over time—ambivalence and exhaustion.

6.9

Nina Nastasia photo courtesy of Biz 3 Publicity

SOAPBOX

CHILLWAVE OF MUTILATION

Chillwave is a nebulous descriptor, which might explain why the genre has no real identity. It's the *Seinfeld* of musical genres, a bizarre case of art imitating life and vice-versa, satire run amuck. The term was originally coined by skewer-happy Hipster Runoff blogger Carles in a July 2009 post about the band Washed Out. Struggling to name the still-nascent nü-synth movement the band is ostensibly a part of, Carles' other ideas included "ZanyCore," "Pitchforkwavegaze" and "Music 2 smoke weed 2." But "Chillwave" stuck, and was soon repeated enough times in enough far-flung corners of the Internet, and eventually in print, for it to be completely stripped of its original irony.

So what the hell *is* Chillwave? The music that gets slapped with this dubious title is something of a call-to-arms for slacker-types and rising Millenials. It lazes in nostalgia for the kitsch of the '80s and '90s, while paradoxically embarking on a justifiably earnest search for musical authenticity. "[L]ike something playing in the background of an old VHS cassette that you found in your attic from the late '80s/early '90s," Carles wrote, Chillwave artists take the dreamy, space-cadet pop of those decades (schmaltz and all) and reconfigure it for modern audiences. If it's melodic and hazy with pseudo-profound lyrics reverb'd to 11, it's Chillwave.

Chillwave's so-called heavies include the likes of Ariel Pink, Neon Indian, Toro y Moi and Memory Tapes, all of which have a few shared elements (like 808 drum machines and synths of Super Nintendo quality) but they're more dissimilar than alike. Memory Tapes are by all accounts a French-electro throwback and Toro y Moi holds court with M83 in shoegaze purgatory; meanwhile, Washed Out flies its freak flag under the Balearic Beat sub-genre. But even Chillwave's would-be figureheads are wary of the term. Before a recent show at The Earl in Atlanta, Chazwick Bundick—the creative force behind Toro y Moi—admitted, "This music hasn't been around long enough to merit a name yet. I listened to a shit-ton of disco, J Dilla and My Bloody Valentine in college. I'm just picking up where others left off."

If the genre's own alleged practitioners can't agree on matters of substance, it's an even bet whether Chillwave's house of Casios will survive these growing pains and become a mansion on a hill, or just buckle under its own weight. For now, as Bundick smirks, "It's basically a meaningless term." **MICHAEL SABA**

KELE

The Boxer

GLASSNOTE MUSIC

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 21

Takes a few blows, but wins in round two

Boxers are studies in contrast: brutish but graceful, quick but enduring. With his first solo album, Bloc Party frontman Kele Okereke reveals similar juxtapositions, his feathery falsettos duking it out with the discordant electro beats. He makes a strong declaration of independence in the opener, "Walk Tall," where he roars over a ferocious synth saw, "Cut your ties to the past and wave it goodbye." The second track seeks to sever his indie-rock ties altogether, with his pitch manipulated into a high squeak and layered over old-school breaks. But while *The Boxer* is many things its namesake suggests—brash, fearless—it's clumsy and confusing at times, too. The disparate elements tend to compete with each other, leading to the paranoid seizure of tracks like "All the Things I Could Never Say," on which Okereke assumes the role of a preacher, with results too bizarre to be revelatory. Still, his earnestness shines through, and in shaking off his rock baggage, he's made the best kind of electro album: the sort that can be appreciated just as much from the couch as the club. **SARA LIBBY** **7.1**

Kele photo by Sarah Piantadosi

DANGER MOUSE AND SPARKLEHORSE

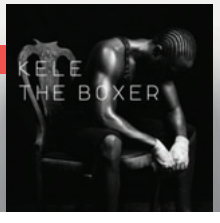
Dark Night of the Soul

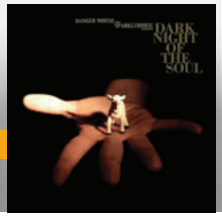
EMI

RELEASE DATE: JULY 13

Tragedy-shrouded instant classic escapes lawyers' clutches

Recorded in 2009 as part of a multimedia project devised by Danger Mouse, Sparklehorse (née Mark Linkous) and filmmaker David Lynch, *Dark Night of the Soul* was shelved for more than a year as EMI and Danger Mouse proprietor Brian Burton resolved legal differences that still haven't been fully disclosed. The controversy nearly obscured the resounding triumph of the album itself; written and produced by Burton and Linkous, it's a breathtaking set of atmospheric ballads (plus a few rockers) that explore cosmic concerns, from the self-destructive trap of revenge to the possibility of spiritual renewal. Danger Mouse's spooky signature sound—a mix of shimmering keyboards, fuzzy echo and squiggly ambient noises—provides a mesmerizing backdrop for guest vocalists including Iggy Pop (the roaring "Pain"), the Shins' James Mercer (the Beatlesque "Insane Lullaby") and Lynch (the creepy title track), among others. A somber fog has always swathed the album; following the recent deaths of Linkous and contributor Vic Chesnutt, the melancholy is nearly unbearable. **JON YOUNG** **9.0**





WALK HARD

String-slinger takes two steps forward, one step back

BY JEFF VRABEL

ROBERT RANDOLPH

We Walk This Road

WARNER BROS.

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

Sacred steel maestro Robert Randolph seems destined to play a big tent. With his scorching virtuosity and a devotional background (the Pentecostal church supplied his earliest musical influences) his cross-platfrom appeal makes him equally suitable for Bonnaroo, blues fests and *SportsCenter* promos; recent years have seen him burning off Hendrix covers with the Roots as comfortably as he opened for B.B. King.

In the past, Randolph used his fire-and-brimstone upbringing and diagnosably insane guitar skills to ignite bonfires; signature tracks like "Going in the Right Direction" and "I Need More Love" from his 2003 debut *Unclassified* were blues-based bangers designed to elicit some combination of rafter-rattling and the saving of a decent volume of souls. But that's not the case with *We Walk This Road,* Randolph's first album in four years, on which he and his Family Band ease back on the throttle for a more restrained version of their Sly Stone/Stevie Ray Vaughan blues-gospel-funk fusion.

The restraint is probably due to the guiding hand of producer T Bone Burnett, who is pretty good at this sort of thing. Randolph's noise is still joyful, of course—it's just a simmer when it used to be an inferno. But that's purely by design; *Road* has quite a few new goals in mind. It's framed as a modern repurposing of African-American music drawn from all corners of the past century. It was recorded over two years and shaped by what Randolph has said were listening sessions to archival, sometimes public-domain, compositions. (He claims to have dropped $5,000 on iTunes while digging through long-lost songs and newer influences—someone send the man a free mouse pad!) It's punctuated by "segues," brief samples of Blind Willie Johnson songs and old gospel numbers. The album seems designed to breathe life into a few dusty corners of Americana, *a la* Bruce Springsteen's folk-meets-New-Orleans-revival *Seeger Sessions* project, but it's also distinctly modern; Randolph includes pointed, tropical covers of tracks by Christian Bob Dylan, angry John Lennon and *Diamonds and Pearls*-era Prince.

As if overwhelmed by the tasks at hand, *We Walk This Road* starts off not with a big, Randolphian bang (2006's *Colorblind,* for instance, opened with "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That," which sported a jump-ball whistle and pavement-rattling second-line stomp) but a meandering whimper. The first four tracks are oddly slow to come to life. Although "Traveling Shoes" sounds like it could burn the varnish off of stages this summer, this studio version comes off plastic-wrapped. The midtempo R&B number "Back to the Wall" struggles to take off, a well-intentioned but rambling cover of Dylan's "Shot Of Love" (featuring Jim Keltner, who drummed on the original) drifts and "I Still Belong to Jesus" edges too close to '70s AM territory.

> Randolph's noise is still joyful, of course—it's just a simmer when it used to be an inferno.

Happily, something clicks about midway through the LP—the back two-thirds finally match Randolph's historical and spiritual aspirations, with songs and arrangements of a much greater insistence. A soaring cover of Prince's "Walk Don't Walk" kills (it's nearly impossible to botch the song, but still); the Lennon cover "I Don't Wanna Be A Soldier Mama" finds the perfect temperature and the Ben Harper-assisted rave-up "If I Had My Way" is a firey blast of swamp-gospel. Randolph lands the record with the great dark-gospel "Dry Bones," a creepy winner propelled by a keys-jangling backbeat, and "Salvation," a lovely coda.

Burnett's production is well-intentioned, but the vibe is a little too restrained, the burn a little too controlled. Burnett stuffs Randolph's guitar work in the back (the sticks-on-wood percussion of "Back to the Wall" gets more sonic love than Randolph's outro solo does), as if to accentuate the songcraft rather than the frontman's virtuosity. That may make sense, given the record's historical framework. But it's hard not to want to hear these songs on the road, where it'll be wise to take a step back and give Randolph some room to preach.

6.8

Photo by Danny Clinch

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

Further

ASTRALWERKS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

No forward motion

On 1997's *Dig Your Own Hole*, The Chemical Brothers did just that. Arguably the best big-beat album from the best 90's electronic squad (sorry, Prodigy), *Hole* set a benchmark that the duo has failed to live up to for the last 13 years. Their seventh LP attempts to recapture the metallic sheen of their heyday, and though there are no "Block Rockin' Beats" here, it's not for lack of trying. The Brothers sincerely want you to dance, and they spend *Further*'s 50 minutes creating alternately spacey ("K+D+B") and vicious ("Horse Power") electronic sketches. If the 12-minute "Escape Velocity" weren't bloated enough, it ends with skittish "Baba O'Riley"-like blips; meanwhile, "Swoon" includes a great synth whiplash and "Another World" sounds like an underwater rave. The biggest problem is how these songs come in only two settings: They either build to some grand crescendo or groove atop that crescendo, making the whole album painfully predictable. A few gems, sure, but *Further* doesn't fly far enough. **5.9**

JUSTIN JACOBS

THE HENRY CLAY PEOPLE

Somewhere on the Golden Coast

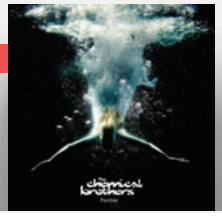
TBD RECORDS

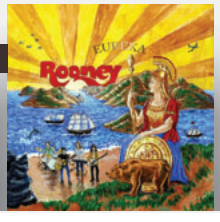
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

The best kind of lazy-boy rock

Somewhere on the Golden Coast finds these SoCal rockers staying true to the form they established on their 2008 sophomore effort, *For Cheap or For Free*. Amid pounding E-Street keys and scuzzy guitar squall, brothers Andy and Joey Siara intone anthem after townie anthem with the cadence of Stephen Malkmus and the brassy enthusiasm of The Hold Steady. Over the course of 11 tightly-wound songs, they get drunk and call in sick ("Working Part Time"), find a couch to crash on (the barroom foot-stomper "End of an Empire") and sound out half-baked feelings of detachment ("This Ain't a Scene"). It's a lively portrait of the mildly disaffected, couch-surfing wage-laborer that's a staple in any music community, painted by five guys who quit the day-job circuit just last year. You don't need to have schlepped your way through a restaurant kitchen to enjoy *Golden Coast*; we've all been "dyin' for a Saturday night" before, and that's just the kind of fun this quintet's third album delivers. **7.9**

RACHEL BAILEY





ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO

Street Songs of Love

FACTORY RECORDS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 29

Unassuming excellence

From his early work with the Nuns, on through Rank & File, the True Believers and more recently with his stellar solo albums, Alejandro Escovedo has remained a low-key legend. He's a guy who, on any given night, can take one song and turn it into an orchestral ballad, a Stooges knife-fight or a Faces-flecked scratch-rocker; sometimes he's David Bowie without the stage dress, sometimes he's Townes Van Zandt with more easily-tamed ghosts, but he's been a relentless—if largely unrecognized—presence on the musical landscape over the last few decades.

But thanks in part to high-wattage fans like Bruce Springsteen, Escovedo now seems to have entered the early curves of a victory lap. Fittingly, he's chosen to commemorate it with a crash of guitars. With writing partner Chuck Prophet and former T. Rex producer Tony Visconti in tow (and a fiery Boss cameo on the standout "Faith"), *Street Songs of Love* finds Escovedo celebrating the gritty intersection between the Stones and the Velvet Underground. As the twang of his earlier solo work slides into loose, greasy soul, the 59-year-old sounds like nothing less than a fountain of youth. Even when the tempo slows on bar ballads like "Down In the Bowery," his voice remains spry.

Not all of *Street Songs*' compositions rank high in his canon—the lyrics on "Tender Heart" feel a bit on the nose, while "This Bed Is Getting Crowded" doesn't scald the way, say, "Castanets" did—but Escovedo's tortured romanticism remains resplendent. "Undesired" is a beautiful losers' travelogue, and even the closing instrumental "Fort Worth Blue" feels confessional. While his weathered humanity may be better captured on sublime offerings like *More Miles Than Money*, it gilds the edges of *Street Songs*, a collection bursting with unflagging energy. **7.9**

JEFF LEVEN

ROONEY

Eureka

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

SoCal pop goes schizo

Rooney's recent history has been marred with a couple of scrapped albums, do-overs and disputes, so it's encouraging to see the band bucking up and finally releasing another record. But *Eureka* sounds like the quintet has grown even more jarringly disjointed. Rooney now lurches from chirpy pop to vintage-y surf-rock tracks, few of which are memorable. A handful of *Eureka*'s songs, like lead single "Can't Get Enough," are decent, and the uncharacteristically belligerent "Not In My House" is even quite enjoyable, but these shine alongside some pretty awful stuff. "Stars and Stripes" is a nauseatingly didactic sermon that sounds utterly parodic, but the band sounds serious in preaching about changin' the world, complete with sickening harmonies comparable only to the boy-bands of the mid-1990s. Despite the mildly pleasant pop tracks scattered throughout, the choking dissonance makes *Eureka* an incongruent mess. **3.6**

GRAY CHAPMAN

THE SIGHTS

Most Of What Follows Is True

SIGHTS ARMY
RELEASE DATE: JULY 13

Most of what follows is alright

Detroit quartet The Sights' fourth full-length offering is about 70 percent rock, 20 percent '60s pop and just enough upbeat folk to rev the album into fifth gear. Hooky tracks like "3 Cheers" come along just in time for summertime windows-down driving; the *Rock Band*-worthy "How Do You Sleep?" runs completely on prominent electric guitar. And just to make sure there's a little something for every musical mood, The Sights throw in the rock-twangy "I Left My Muse," complete with pedal steel, a lilting rhythm and choral howls. The variety is nice, but the album would have been better if it had etched out a more defined route. On "Guilty," the Sights play it safe, with half-hearted guitar riffs and slightly subdued vocals. "My songs, they might be true / But they don't sing me back to you," the band professes on "Back To You," and the confession seems apt. At best, this is a good album for coasting—or any activity where you don't have to pay full attention. **ANNA SWINDLE** 5.0

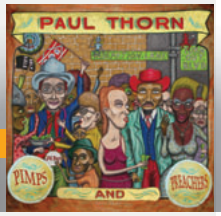
PAUL THORN

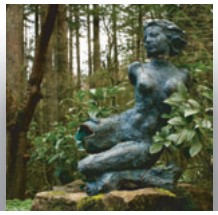
Pimps and Preachers

PERPETUAL OBSCURITY
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

The marriage of heaven and hell

Angels and demons, dark and light, prosperity and poverty—rock music has revelled so long in these dichotomies that they've become cliché, but Tupelo, Miss.-raised singer/songwriter Paul Thorn has lived them all. He was influenced in his formative years by his father (a preacher) and his uncle (a pimp), who created a tug of war in his psyche, inadvertently priming him for his future as a musician—and that yin and yang is apparent in both Thorn's lyrics and the way in which he mixes gospel themes with his rootsy rock 'n' roll. The sacred and the profane pair nicely here, driven by Thorn's dusky voice and subtle, often self-deprecating wit on songs like "Weeds in My Roses" and "I Don't Like Half the Folks I Love." Thorn wades in the muggy Southern rock exemplified by the Drive-By Truckers, but with more humor and less bombast. In his world, good and evil aren't clichés—they're life. **HAL HOROWITZ** 8.1





MENOMENA

Mines

BARSUK
RELEASE DATE: JULY 27

Portland band finally cuts loose

Menomena has always taken a cut-and-paste approach to songwriting. The trio's 2004 debut, *I Am The Fun Blame Monster!*, juxtaposed stilted crescendos of piano, guitar and saxophone with silence. The melodies of 2007's *Friend and Foe* were a bit more bombastic—drums pounding, horns blasting—though the remaining loops still entered and exited without warning, cutting out before they could air out.

Monster and *Foe* were sonically tidy, moody yet never indulgent. On *Mines*, however, full-blown insanity finally breaks free of the straightjacket. Take "Killemall," an apocalyptic race between steady drums and scurrying piano arriving nearly 10 minutes into the album; the song rises and falls in just the right places, with agitated flutes and electric guitars spinning like helicopter rotors at the start and finish and ascending strings acting as checkpoints cuing verses' end.

After that cinematic clamor, Menomena dives headfirst into a murky stream of consciousness, where ghostly voices fill the cracks of their past. Disappearing and reappearing melodies play out like fleeting thoughts; the simple "please don't fail me now" plea of "BOTE" shocks with shrill electric convulsions, and "Five Little Rooms" sounds downright sinister as deep tubas and hollow knocking sounds create a supersonic claustrophobia. *Mines* is Menomena at its best—mentally relentless and physically ruthless. **CHRISTINA LEE** 8.5

Photo by Alicia Rose

THE LOVE LANGUAGE

Libraries

MERGE

RELEASE DATE: JULY 13

Lo-fi quintet gets more ambitious but still wants to cuddle

The second album from North Carolina's The Love Language takes all of 25 seconds to get going, and it seems portentous. You might even catch yourself thinking, "Oh no, this lo-fi pop band has gone mega." Indeed, lead Lover Stuart McLamb has made a tremendous leap in terms of accessibility, scope and arrangement on *Libraries*. His gift for soaring tunes no longer pushes against scrappy guitar (as on the glorious "Sparxxx," from the band's 2009 debut) but rather it expands outward into Arcade Fiery terrain on "Pedals" and GarageBand Springsteen with "Brittany's Back." McLamb makes records you can swoon to, and "This Blood Is Our Own" aims right at that effect, from his throaty, full-on vocals (which ascend precariously high without sounding precarious) to the piercing violins. If you find the drama a little much, McLamb devotes most of the album to cuddly guitar pop with occasional bells—which, as it turns out, is better to swoon to, anyway. **MICHAELANGELO MATOS** 7.2

BLUE GIANT

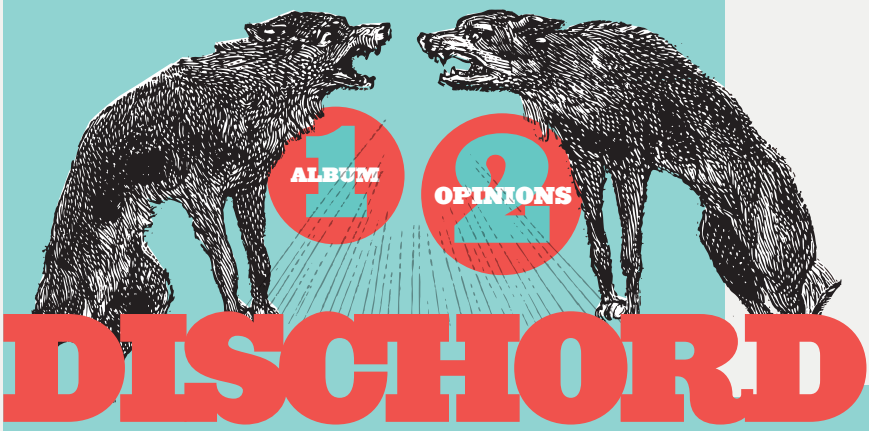
Blue Giant

VANGUARD RECORDS

RELEASE DATE: JULY 13

Perfectly ragged

Blue Giant's debut LP begins with a song about starting over, and that's just what these Pacific Northwesternerns have done. Comprised of members from a smattering of Portland bands and anchored by Viva Voce's Kevin and Anita Robinson, the new outfit's hungry, impulsive olio of folk, rock and alt-country tangles up the sounds of its members' pasts in a tumbleweed of strings, drawls and hollers. On the album's more provincial moments, like the wistful "Target Heart," soft whispers adorn raggedy acoustics like flecks of sunlight on a dusty barn floor; elsewhere, "Blue Sunshine" stomps and bucks its way through a holy mess of rowdy chords and harmonicas, and the equally fervent "Go On" presses forth with a militant vigor. It's a turmoil of glorious noise. **GRAY CHAPMAN** 8.5



DIERKS BENTLEY

Up On The Ridge

CAPITOL RECORDS NASHVILLE

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

YEE-HAW

Put away your cynicism about rolodex records—rarely do albums this star-studded sound quite so organic. *Up on the Ridge* comprises ambitious covers executed with modesty and respect, magnanimous co-writes and a loving attention to sonic detail; a true celebration of the state of modern country. A smoldering cover of Dylan's "Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)" features gorgeous fiddle and mandolin interplay, while the wistful "Draw Me A Map" ranks among Bentley's most poignant ballads, with its aching lead vocal performance; a chart-topper like this guy integrating as deep and disparate a group of performers as Kris Kristofferson, Alison Krauss, Miranda Lambert and Vince Gill is the icing on this home-made cake. (For the rockists, it's the equivalent of The Fray doing a deep blues record with Eric Clapton, Rivers Cuomo, B.B. King and Thom Yorke.) Bentley's creative vision and foresight is rewarded with the fearless execution of this wieldy undertaking. **JEFF LEVEN**

HELL NAW

Dierks Bentley has never made the album his voice deserves. His deep drawl is both robust and laidback, without the painted-on twang of so many big-hat country acts, and it sounds best when he can blur the line between rock and country. So his decision to make a bluegrass-themed album of mostly covers is a little puzzling. Trading his electric guitar for banjos, mandolins, and fiddles, *Up On The Ridge* foregoes his usual bravado for downhome earnestness. He never sounds especially persuasive or invested, whether he's seducing a woman on the title track, fêting a civil rights leader on U2's "Pride (In The Name of Love)," or retracing Dylan's footsteps on the deserter's yarn "Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)." Even Kris Kristofferson can't enliven the drinking ode "Bottle to the Bottom," and if you're going to get Jamey Johnson and Miranda Lambert together in the studio, you gotta do better than a wan take on Verlon Thompson's vice ode "Bad Angel." **STEPHEN M. DEUSNER**

Dierks Bentley, photo by Danny Clinch

STARS

The Five Ghosts

SOFT REVOLUTION RECORDS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

Canadian quintet's sixth full length dials up the drama

Nine years ago, Stars burst forth with *Nightsongs*, their intelligent, delirious debut. It was Leonard-Bernstein-does-Europop, surging skyward with a sunny warmth that would inform their subsequent albums, *Heart* and *Set Yourself on Fire*. With their newest release, though, that flame has flickered into ash. On *The Five Ghosts*, the love-letters and sing-songy refrains of *Heart* are nowhere to be found; gone, too, are *Fire*'s passions-set-ablaze. What's left is a world much graver, where lovers die just to haunt each other—and it seems like an absolutely natural progression for the band.

Like the volatile relationships that Amy Millan and Torquil Campbell sing about, Stars' oeuvre has evolved from ebullient to frantic, and occasionally grim. And although autumnal moments have slipped into all of their albums, *Ghosts* is their first full-on plunge into dysphoria. Millan's exquisite voice flits from smoldering on "Wasted Daylight" to angelic on "Winter Bones"; its beauty, coupled with the band's theatrical flair and a handful of punchier tracks, rescues the album from overwhelming ennui. Despite following the requiem of "I Died So I Could Haunt You," "Fixed" especially lightens the mood without cheapening it.

Stars' dramatic arrangements remain very much alive here, their instrumentation gleaming—as always—with allusions somewhere between New Order's shimmering waveforms and The Smiths' guitar rock. *Ghosts*' 2007 predecessor, *In Our Bedroom After the War,* applied extravagant orchestral layers to poppy hooks; it was the band's most dramatic composition to date, and the new album doesn't even attempt to compete. Instead, *Ghosts* skirts its predecessor's instrumental self-indulgence, allowing its tracks to swim in grandeur—but not drown.

The album does have one bizarre moment of inconsistency. "We Don't Want Your Body" is egregiously glib for this otherwise careful record; after the mournful pageantry of the preceding tracks, it's discordant to hear Millan chirp words like "so you can have some sex with me." Maybe the band's just having some fun amidst all the gloom. Can't exactly blame them, but they're better when they're moping. **8.6**

GRAY CHAPMAN

ELIZABETH COOK

Welder

31 TIGERS

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fermented goodness

Elizabeth Cook's last album, the Rodney Crowell-produced *Balls*, was straight up Dolly-worshippin' country, full of stretchy pedal steel and yodel-peppered sass. But if that one was chilled-in-the-box strawberry wine, *Welder* is mulberry-flavored moonshine: homemade, delicious and completely unsanitary. First of all, there's Cook's twangy alto; it used to slip-slide through her lyrics to sweet-as-peach-cobbler effect, but on this release, it's more shrill and even more heavily accented. She doesn't sing too much either; she chortles and spits and coos and chants. Previous releases were sprinkled with her characteristic wit, which has gone to seed and run wild here. On "Rock 'n' Roll Man," she snarks a self-appointed rock-god boyfriend: "Wears a gold lightning bolt in one of his ears / Likes to talk about Elvis, but only in the Sun years." Hilltop funerals, soup kitchens and backcountry hoedowns become the stuff of legend in *Welder*'s expansive tales, and though it features production by Don Was and guest appearances by Crowell and Buddy Miller, this album is all about Cook finally finding her voice—warm and gritty as Appalachian soil. **8.4**

RACHEL DOVEY

JIMMIE VAUGHAN

Blues, Ballads, and Favorites

SHOUT!

RELEASE DATE: JULY 6

Blues vet needs to step up his game

The last time Jimmie Vaughan released a solo album, Barack Obama was a little-known state senator from Illinois and the dot-com bubble had just burst. Though much has changed over the past nine years, the blues remains the same. In 2010, Vaughan is unfashionably fashionable as ever, but something is lacking in these 13 songs—urgency, perhaps? It certainly doesn't bode well that this comeback album is a collection of covers. *Blues, Ballads, and Favorites* is full of lean, brassy selections that focus on taut, swinging grooves, wiry riffs and grunting baritone sax, but the album yields few surprises. Although Vaughan translates Willie Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away" into a soul ballad, and turns over lead vocals to old friend Lou Ann Barton on Little Richard's "Send Me Some Lovin'," the album runs out of momentum about halfway through. It's an obvious labor of love for a man who has decoded the DNA of the blues strand by strand, but still not worth the near-decade wait. **6.8**

MATT FINK

Elizabeth Cook photo by Kristin Barlowe

QUOTABLE LYRICS

As our own Rachael Maddux notes in her review of *This Is Happening*, LCD Soundsystem's third album is most likely its last. In honor of James Murphy's ever-witty verses ("I'm losing my edge to the art-school Brooklynites in little jackets and borrowed nostalgia for the unremembered '80s") here are some of this month's most quotable lyrics.

Rhymefest, *El Che*, "How High" (pg. 72)
(1:48) "We don't be yellin' out raps, we articulate prose"

LCD Soundsystem, *This is Happening*, "Drunk Girls" (pg. 68)
(1:12) "Drunk girls know that love is an astronaut /
It comes back but it's never the same"

Curtis Mayfield, *Can You Dig It?*, "Pusherman" (pg. 88)
(3:18) "For a generous fee, make your world what you want it to be."

Elizabeth Cook, *Welder*, "El Camino" (pg. 84)
(2:03) "If I wake up married, I have to annul it /
Right now my hands are in his mullet."

Elliott Smith, *From a Basement on the Hill*, "Pretty (Ugly Before)" (pg. 89)
(0:13) "Sunshine been keeping me up for days /
There is no nighttime, it's only a passing phase."

Mary Gauthier, *The Foundling*, "The Orphan King" (73)
(3:54) "Like Moses and Batman and James Dean, I still believe in love."

LCD Soundsystem photo by Jake Walters

NADA SURF

If I Had a Hi-Fi

MARDEV
RELEASE DATE:
JUNE 8

Forever a tribute band

On their sixth album, Nada Surf repurposes a dozen songs from inside and outside pop music's canon. Covers, of course, are always fraught with peril, and at times singer/guitarist Matthew Caws' inflection has a way of fermenting the source material's latent cheese. On the synth-less "Enjoy the Silence," he over-enunciates some of Depeche Mode's most ironically banal lyrics: "Words are meaningless / And forgettable." But on "Love and Anger," a ballad originally energized by Kate Bush's octave-bending trill, he belts the melody to better effect. The appropriation of other people's words works best on "Agony of Lafitte," Spoon's 2000 mock-rock vendetta against a turncoat at Elektra Records; the same label long ago dropped Nada Surf, it's been said, for failing to manufacture the molded, Weezer-soundalike singles of their early career. The upshot of that rejection was the trio developing a style less bratty and more serene, but nonetheless derivative. Maybe they've always been a tribute band. **CAMERON BIRD**

7.0

BLITZEN TRAPPER

Destroyer of the Void

SUB POP
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Crazy beautiful

Oregonian sextet Blitzen Trapper isn't afraid to dream big. They made a name for themselves with their last two albums by throwing a mess of elements into the mix with wild abandon: Americana lyrics, spaced-out synths, snarly riffs. With this follow-up to 2008's *Furr*, they're at it again with pristine harmonies set to late-60's psychedelic scuzz. The result is another opus-de-Americana washed in experimental folk-rock—a zealous, if unfocused, tale of back-road pain and otherworldly redemption. The six-minute title track (an epic that frontman Eric Earley has described as "three or four different songs melded together") slithers between tempos, harmonies and chord progressions as though the group had just lifted the needle on "Bohemian Rhapsody." "The Man Who Would Speak True," meanwhile, relies on acoustic vibrations, Cash-like storytelling simplicity and rusty harmonica. Blitzen Trapper's world is certainly chaotic; thankfully, the cacophony of heavenly choruses and gorgeous melodies finds its own voice amidst their experimentations. **DAN HYMAN**

7.3

THE BLACK KEYS

Brothers

NONESUCH

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Music shines, lyrics whine

Yes, Danger Mouse produced a track ("Tighten Up") for this blues-rock duo on its sixth album. But the name to note in the credits is mixer Tchad Blake, who gives the songs a swampy texture that nevertheless carves out individual space for each instrument. Guitarist Dan Auerbach and drummer Patrick Carney swing more loosely than usual, too, particularly on the Bo Diddley-gone-glam stomp "Howlin' For You." "The Only One" incorporates droning organ chords to nice effect. The problem is the songs. Auerbach can sing with feeling (see the cover of Jerry Butler's "Never Gonna Give You Up," which features vocals reminiscent of vintage Todd Rundgren), but his lyrics are so banal they hardly seem worth the trouble. Like on "Too Afraid to Love You," to pick just one example: "I can't afford to lose one more teardrop from my eye." Come *on*. These guys rock hard, but they need to lose the high school poetry.

MICHAELANGELO MATOS 6.5

TOKYO POLICE CLUB

Champ

MOM & POP

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

A winning do-over

The blog-bait now known as Tokyo Police Club used to be called Suburbia, a more honest (if inelegant) reflection of their ingenuous post-punk/emo blend. The band's 2006 breakout EP, *A Lesson in Crime*, distilled twitchy synths and guitars into two-minute blasts of hormones and naiveté, but on 2008 LP *Elephant Shell*, they handcuffed themselves by aiming for the kind of layered, measured album favored by their new label, Saddle Creek—a wannabe grownup album from a group that thrived on juvenilia. Their sophomore LP, the optimistically titled *Champ*, opens promisingly with the lean, mean "Favorite Food," on which blown-out fuzz and shrilling organs snowball into an incandescent rock jitter, as Dave Monks' warm, approachable voice spins out a self-conscious suburban fantasy of bandaged knees and melting sugar. He sounds a bit like Dan Bejar's little brother, especially over the theatrical start-stop riffs of "Favorite Color." "It's good to be back," Monks sighs on "Breakneck Speed," as Tokyo Police Club get back to doing their favorite thing: Playing their hearts out, two or three minutes at a time.

BRIAN HOWE 7.7

PHOSPHORESCENT

Here's to Taking It Easy

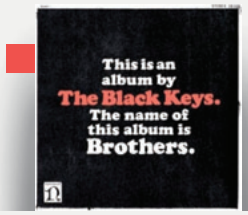
DEAD OCEANS

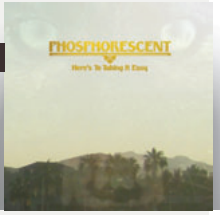
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

On the road again

Last year, Phosphorescent braintrust Matthew Houck released a Willie Nelson tribute album featuring eleven well-chosen covers that avoided all the obvious hits and sentiments. He and his honkytonk band have obviously learned from that endeavor: The songs on this gorgeously sadsack follow-up *Here's to Taking It Easy* evoke lost days and lonely nights with keen observations and road-weary melodies. "Baby, all these cities, ain't they all startin' to look all the same?" Houck laments on the rip-roaring opener "It's Hard to Be Humble (When You're from Alabama)," as a horn section roars ahead with trucker's speed. All of Houck's southern eccentricities remain gloriously intact, from his eloquently hangdog vocals to his minimalist songwriting on "Hej, Me I'm Light." Best of all is "The Mermaid Parade," an ode to a bicoastal break-up that'll have you shedding a tear in your PBR.

STEPHEN M. DEUSNER 8.9





BAND OF HORSES

Infinite Arms

BROWN RECORDS/FAT POSSUM/COLUMBIA

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Lowcountry's finest do it again

While ruminating on his Sub Pop days during a 2008 interview, former label head Bruce Pavitt was asked who his favorite current band on the roster was. "Band of Horses," was his surprising answer. "Those guys are doing some really amazing things." Considering Pavitt can now be found hanging with shamans in the jungles of South America, it was hard to tell if he was being completely serious. But let's just say that the man credited with discovering Nirvana was, intentionally or not, on to something.

More muscular than The Avett Brothers or Iron & Wine, less concerned with experimentation than Wilco, and free of the folk prison occupied by Fleet Foxes, Band of Horses—now recording, indirectly, for Columbia through their own Brown Records—might be the best traditional rock band in America not named My Morning Jacket. This is, to put it mildly, shocking.

On *Infinite Arms*, Frontman Ben Bridwell leads the Horses a little further out of Neil Young's backyard. After lead track "Factory" enters the world amid a fanfare of faux strings, "Compliments" harkens back to the band's wheelhouse with Bridwell shaking his tattooed forearms at the sky, questioning the existence of God in the air, righteous power chords at his side.

But the crew relies less on guitar bombast this time out. Seemingly able to kick out a chug-a-lug stomper with absolute ease at this point, the best moments on *Infinite Arms* center around Bridwell's growing confidence in the his deadliest weapon: his voice. "On My Way Back Home" pushes his upper register to the breaking point over a slowly growing drumbeat, "Evening Kitchen" revels in the kind of man-on-man, nearly CSN&Y-grade harmonies that send a shiver down your back (and your finger scrambling for the "repeat" button) and album-apex "Older" sounds warm and worn-in, like some porch-swing hymn passed down through the generations of the band's South Carolina roots.

After three albums, Band of Horses finally sound comfortable being what they are: A rock band. A *really fucking good rock band*. Somewhere in the deepest jungles of Peru, Bruce Pavitt is smiling.

BART BLASENGAME 8.9

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BLAXPLOITATION BLUES

Compilation collects sound of an infamous genre

BY RACHEL DOVEY

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Can You Dig It?: The Music and Politics of Black Action Films 1968-1975

SOUL JAZZ

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In 1971, Gordon Parks' low-budget shoot-'em-up *Shaft* grossed $12 million and ushered in a new genre: Black Action. By 1976, the 50-odd films directed, acted, produced and scored by black professionals had been dubbed "Blaxploitation" by the NAACP and sparked so much protest from the Congress for Racial Equality that Hollywood essentially stopped funding them. African-American academia had good reason for shunning flicks like *Shaft, Super Fly* and *Foxy Brown*. Featuring black dealers, prostitutes and vigilantes as protagonists, the films peddled hard-boiled hustler stereotypes and luxuriated in the very myths they created. Pushers drove Cadillac Eldorados and sniffed blow off golden platters. Street-wise cops single-handedly overthrew the white mafia. Hookers whooped The Man.

Troublesome as it was, Blaxploitation birthed a host of larger-than-life anti-heroes who even now refuse to fade into the particleboard woodwork of the '70s. Characters like Shaft, Youngblood Priest and Coffy all had one thing in common: They were hopelessly netted in a global system—the drug trade, the sex-and-drug trade, the corrupt police force—and squirming to get out. That they always managed to wiggle (or kung fu fight) free was more than extreme wishful thinking. It was a desperately hopeful re-telling of the American fable of individualism, set smack in the middle of the last place true individualism was possible: the integrated, graffiti-swathed, neon-lit cities of the post-Civil Rights era.

The complexities teeming beneath the surface of these films live on in their scores. Soul Jazz's two-disc, 34-song compilation *Can You Dig It?* is the soundtrack to half a decade of controversial cinema, boasting originals from Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield, Booker T and the MG's and Roy Ayers, among many others, and capturing all the subtlety and nuance the films avoid.

Granted, the lyrics are often about as formulaic as the characters themselves. In the now-ubiquitous "Shaft," Hayes asks "Who's the black private dick / That's a sex machine to all the chicks?" while a girl-group ensemble declares: "Shaft!" But the anxieties of the era can be felt far more deeply in the music itself. Though many of the songs—"Shaft" and Bobby Womack's "Across 110th Street" to name a few—sound like blasé coasting tunes on first listen, with their wah-wah-distorted chords bouncing like shocks on a low-rider, a different narrative emerges in the percussion. The rattling gourds and echoing steel-drum and bongo beats of J.J. Johnson's "Willie Chase" and The Impressions' "Make A Resolution" evoke the genre's back-to-Africa nostalgia and flirtation with black nationalism. And just as the shadow of the segregated '50s lurks around the edges of Black Action, the syncopated drum flicks and off-the-cuff sax solos in "Sweetback's Theme" (Brer Soul & Earth, Wind & Fire) and "They Call Me MISTER Tibbs" (Quincy Jones) hint at the earlier bebop movement.

It was a desperately hopeful re-telling of the American fable of individualism, set smack in the middle of the last place where true individualism was possible.

Embodying and subverting the stereotypes of Blaxploitation most completely is Curtis Mayfield's "Pusherman." He creates a standard wheelin'-and-dealin' trickster-figure in the opening lyrics ("I'm your mama, I'm your daddy, I'm that nigger in the alley / I'm your doctor when you need, want some coke, have some weed") before his eerily high voice slides down into a persuasive "I'm your pusherman." But the carefree demeanor of this "I'll-be-anything-you-want" character is undercut by tinny drums throbbing as irregularly as a skipping heartbeat. As if trying to convince himself, Mayfield repeats "got to get mellow now, got to get mellow, y'all," until the refrain is nearly frantic.

Thirty-four years after Black Action films were red-taped, the themes still resonate, and not just on this compilation. The genre was knighted with Cult Status when Quentin Tarantino cast Pam Grier in 1997's *Jackie Brown*, and *Austin Powers in Goldmember* followed suit in 2002 with Beyoncé as the cartoonish Foxxy Cleopatra; the carefully crafted "gangsta sells" personas of contemporary rappers draw from these contentious flicks, too. Ultimately, though, what lives on more than anything else from Blaxploitation is Mayfield's downward-spiraling refrain. It's the sound of a proud outsider losing to a web of forces bigger than himself.

8.3

Sidney Poitier as Virgil Tibbs in *The Organization*

➥ RACHEL DOVEY IS A *PASTE* ASSISTANT EDITOR.

BIG AUDIO DYNAMITE

This Is Big Audio Dynamite: Legacy Edition

LEGACY RECORDINGS

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Let bygones be bygones

When Mick Jones was kicked out of The Clash in the early '80s, he formed Big Audio Dynamite, a group that melded Jones' pop sensibilities with his earlier band's punk ethos. This new edition of their 1985 debut, *This Is Big Audio Dynamite,* comes as a two-disc set featuring several remixed tracks, including "E=Mc²" and their first single "The Bottom Line." On the first disc, the songs appear in their original form, showcasing Jones' catchy hooks, experimental spoken-word phrasing and music/women/drugs lyricism. It's iconic '80s fare, as frothy and over-the-top as teased bangs and acid-washed jeans. Meanwhile, the second disc's outtakes, remixes and B-sides tarnish the originals, combining syncopated dance beats with vocoder-filtered lyrics, spaghetti-western samples and screams that lend an air of schlolcky Eurotrash. Those songs fell to the cutting-room floor for a reason, and should've remained buried. **LINDSEY LEE** 4.3

BLACK TAMBOURINE

Black Tambourine

SLUMBERLAND

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Gauzy shoegaze transcends its era

Some reissues work because they winnow a voluminous discography down to manageable size. This one does the opposite. Washington, D.C., noise-poppers Black Tambourine had the briefest of careers between the '80s and '90s, and this new collection of the band's complete works inflates its output from a prior compilation's 10 songs to a whopping 16, four of them recorded a year ago. Formally, the band straddles Shop Assistants-referencing Brit-indie, My Bloody Valentine-esque shoegaze and a Heavenly-like neo-girl group attitude, slathering feedback all over the slow-mo pining of "Black Car" and revving into stark rave-up mode on "Throw Aggi Off the Bridge." Black Tambourine can be amateurish: "Can't Explain" seems as if it's being held together with chewed-up licorice and broken guitar strings. But it also builds to a fine frenzy that fans of Vivian Girls will find pleasantly familiar. **MICHAELANGELO MATOS** 7.3

8.5

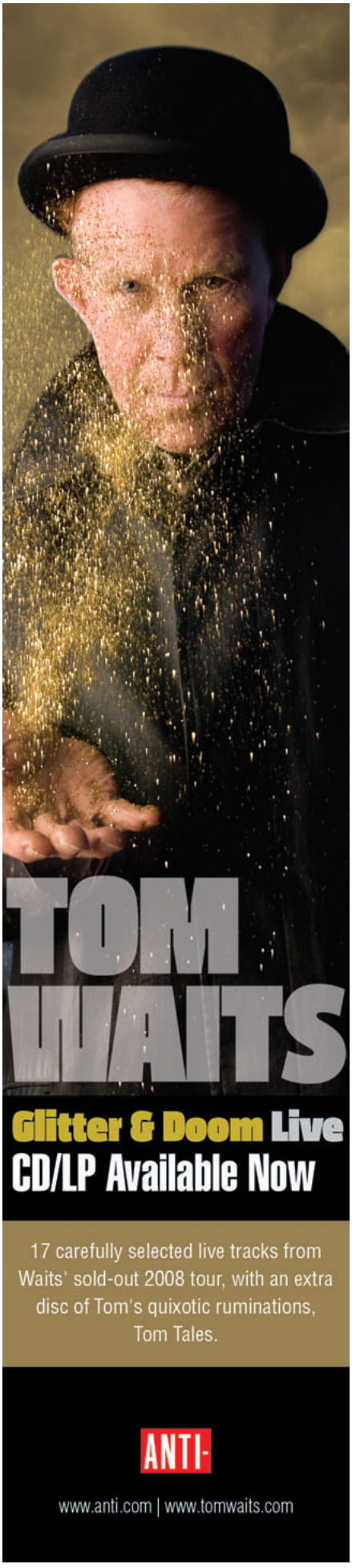
6.8

ELLIOTT SMITH

Roman Candle ***From a Basement on the Hill***

KILL ROCK STARS RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW ***Alpha and omega***

Elliott Smith's 1994 debut and his 2004 swan song aren't his best or most popular albums, but both are crucial to understanding the shape of his sadly truncated career. Showcasing Smith's formative sound and quietly devastating songwriting, *Roman Candle* may be his most underrated work, and the austere "No Name #3" and "Condor Ave" hint at the greater triumphs of his next two albums, *Elliott Smith* and *Either/Or.* By contrast, *From a Basement on the Hill* (incomplete at the time of his death but finished by producer Rob Schnapf and longtime collaborator Joanna Bolme) may be his most overrated; it substitutes busy arrangements for piercing hooks, and the songwriting is bitter as he revives an old addiction metaphor on "Strung Out Again." These reissues, which wisely add no bonus tracks to disrupt the careful original sequencing, not only show where Smith had been—they underscore the tragedy of never knowing where he might have gone. **STEPHEN M. DEUSNER**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HOME AGAIN

Classic gets tidied up, but still rocks

BY MICHAELANGELO MATOS

ROLLING STONES

Exile on Main St. Deluxe Edition

ROLLING STONES/UNIVERSAL

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

My first thought on hearing this cleaned-up edition of the most notoriously dirty album in rock history was, "Oh, good, I can finally understand the words." Second thought: "Oh, wait—I don't *want* to understand the words." Some things, as they say, are better left unknown.

What that means is that I have my memories of this album and you have yours, and in this case I'm happier knowing and recalling what I knew and recalled long before Mick and Keith and

a whole new generation of sound engineers got their hands on *Exile*. I don't mean that my way of hearing it is more correct than any other. This album is such a touchstone that all the reprocessing in the world can't significantly alter the experience of hearing it.

What started as a kind of accident—album sessions in Côte d'Azur, France, in the basement of a 16-room mansion—led to the multitrack bleed-through that became *Exile*'s calling card. The album's murk puts it in a unique place among both Stones albums and rock classics: No matter how closely you listen, it always sounds distant. *Exile* communicates most clearly in flashes. "Skydiver inside her," "the judge and jury walk out hand-in-hand," "grotesque music, milloin-dollar sad"—these lines jump out of "Casino Boogie" like guideposts in music that's too swampy to comprehend in full.

Nearly four decades on, this remains *Exile*'s primary gift to listeners: implication rather than definition. We keep hearing that rock and roll is a feeling, right? The Stones embodies that feeling. On a better-defined album, we could hear that "Sweet Virginia" is more country than *Let It Bleed*'s "Country Honk," but here it just seems more Stones—more attuned to their increasingly hazy outlook, and their embrace of all the American roots music they could wrangle in one place.

Keith Richards famously said that when he was on heroin, he learned to ski and made *Exile on Main St.* Maybe that's why people seldom bring up the biggest stylistic difference between *Exile* and the Stones' other albums: gospel. The album seems so unholy, but "Let It Loose" is bathed in sacred sounds, "Shine a Light" tweaks the form without disrespecting it and when Jagger sings "You don't want to walk and talk about Jesus" on "I Just Want to See His Face," there's no disguising where the track's apostate ghost-boogie comes from. If seeing God is the basic goal of drug use, this probably isn't a coincidence.

> A few bands could have only issued these 10 outtakes and forged a cult. The Stones rightly decided they had a masterpiece without them.

Exile's reissue comes with a disc of unreleased material, too. So how are the bonus tracks? Actually, pretty good. The outtake of "Loving Cup,"—maybe the *cuddliest* song of the Stones' career—is a bluesier 12-bar shuffle that stumbles to a close, while Keith's lightly echoed vocals and the New Orleans-style horns on the unreleased take of "Soul Survivor" put you right in the era; ditto "Pass the Wine (Sophia Loren)." Meanwhile "Good Time Women," (aka, the first draft of "Tumbling Dice") sounds merely like a very good Faces song. A few bands could have only issued these 10 outtakes and forged a cult. The Stones rightly decided they had a masterpiece without them

10.0

Photo by Paul Cox / Courtesy of Elektra Records

THE CURE

Disintegration (Deluxe Edition)

RHINO

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 8

Mournful classic holds up

Disintegration is less a collection of epically needy songs and more the distillation of a specific feeling, namely the one in which you lay around sobbing into your pillow, scrawling wretched poetry into a Composition Notebook and maybe wearing a cape, depending on how awesome your mall was in 1989. This spiffy 20th-anniversary edition is a reminder of the album's delicate, droopy perfection—removed from The Cure's late '80s goth-takeover phase, it seems more approachable, even to people who now dress in color. That said, it's odd to recall how little actually happens in these songs; for all their exquisite sweep, iconic tracks like "Pictures of You" and "Closedown" sure do go on with themselves. But who hasn't suffered the pure, grand, exhausting-your-friends pain of "Plainsong," or swooned desperately like Robert Smith in "Lovesong"? The frontman himself cleaned up the 12-track original for this reissue and the three-disc set includes a 20-track grab-bag of mostly-instrumental demos, rehearsals and scraps. Obsessives will be greatly rewarded; casual fans will enjoy the nostalgia, and almost everyone will Facebook some exes. **JEFF VRABEL** **8.5**

BOB DESPER

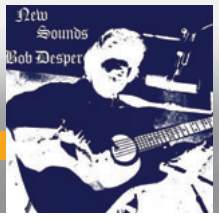
New Sounds

DISCOURAGE RECORDS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

A cult favorite resurfaces

New Sounds, the only album ever released by blind singer and guitarist Bob Desper, came out on a tiny Portland, Ore. label in 1974. It eventually became a prized collectible for fans of downer-folk, with copies selling for a thousand bucks or more. The record certainly has its charms: Desper's yearning voice encompasses Tim Buckley's dreaminess and Chris Isaak's melancholy, while the sole accompaniment—his ringing acoustic guitar—is gorgeous, despite what must have been a minuscule recording budget. But the songwriting is simply adequate, offering pleasantly forgettable melodies and mild lyrics that reflect a spiritual—and sometimes specifically Christian—bent with clichés like, "Just remember there's a better day." Discourage Records' vinyl reissue of *New Sounds* comes with a bonus 7-inch of Desper's 1972 single, "Dry Up Those Tears," with its obvious George Harrison influence. Too bad there wasn't a sequel to 1974's promising beginning; though still living in Oregon, Desper hasn't recorded since. **JON YOUNG** **7.1**



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VANGUARD SUGAR HILL

MISHMASH

A war of whimsy

BY STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

MICMACS

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR: Jean-Pierre Jeunet
WRITERS: Jeunet, Guillaume Laurant
STARRING: Dany Boon, André Dussollier, Julie Ferrier
STUDIO: Sony Pictures Classics

Early in *Micmacs*, the latest film from French director Jean-Pierre Jeunet, two events befall protagonist Bazil that affect his life dramatically. First, when he is a boy, his father is killed by a landmine. Many years later, when Bazil is a young man (played by French comedian Dany Boon), he's struck in the head by a bullet. It's tough to say which affects him more direly: The loss of his father drives his mother insane and sends Bazil to an orphanage, but the gunshot costs him his home, his job, his possessions—everything. To cap it off, the bullet remains embedded in his brain and could kill him at any moment.

Despite all this, *Micmacs* is a comedy. As in the rest of his oeuvre, Jeunet presents these tragedies with a whimsical touch. He's deeply concerned with the ethics of war—primarily the wrongs. Bazil learns the landmine his father stepped on was manufactured by one Parisian weapons corporation, and the bullet by their competitor. The companies are conveniently headquartered across the street from each other, as if constantly crossing swords. Both are run by unscrupulous executives (played with comic unctuousness by André Dussollier and Nicolas Marié) who profit from others' misery.

Bazil, of course, must have his revenge. But first, homeless and penniless, he is taken in by a gang of sweet, eccentric junkyard dwellers—a beautiful contortionist, a math whiz, an inventor. The actors will be recognizable to anyone who has seen a Jeunet film (Dominique Pinon has been in almost all of them), and as a group they will be intensely familiar; the director has explored the idea of makeshift families on the periphery of society in almost all of his movies, including *Delicatessen* and even *Alien: Resurrection*. An early scene where the crew shares a bowl of spaghetti exhibits a casual poignancy that makes you want to pull up a chair at the table, and their elaborate pranks against the executives possess a manic ingenuity that subverts action-movie tropes (the car chase, the break-in) with silent-film machinations.

Micmacs thrums with energy, which is no surprise for Jeunet, whose films unfold like Rube Goldberg devices. However, the costs and accountabilities of war are serious topics for any comedy to address, and the friction between the fantastical and the horrific creates some jarring moments, especially toward the end. Bazil breaks into the home of one of the weapons execs using an array of clever tricks, but then the scene changes abruptly, and violently, as a group of minor characters get shot in cold blood. The good guys are neither the killers nor the killed, but the intrusion of harsh reality (gunshots, bullet wounds, corpses) into endearing fantasy threatens to cheapen both.

Micmacs thrums with energy, which is no surprise for Jeunet, whose films unfold like Rube Goldberg devices.

Jeunet has addressed similarly grave issues in the past, but their unusual settings (*The City of Lost Children*) or chirpy characters (*Amélie*) lent an allegorical tone or a lighter touch, making them no darker than a fairy tale. This film's outrage is anchored in our very real and recognizable world, and it comes across as either overly harsh or overly clever. Jeunet wants to shake us out of our seats, to provoke anger that anyone could profit from wholesale death; there's certainly nothing wrong with using comedy as fuel for the ire. In fact, some of the most outraged films are also some of the funniest—*Dr. Strangelove* and *Blazing Saddles* come immediately to mind.

Micmacs does not belong in their company. It fails to agitate, but it does charm, thanks primarily to Boon. This role may not do for his career what *Amélie* did for Audrey Tautou's, but his rubbery features convey the ideal mix of wonder and pain. He makes us feel both his loss and his optimism, especially in his scenes with the contortionist (played by Julie Ferrier), who begins as a bickering foil and ends as an unlikely love interest. Even when *Micmacs* loses its way, these two characters remain its moral and emotional compass.

6.8

Photo courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics

STEPHEN M. DEUSNER IS A LONGTIME *PASTE* CONTRIBUTOR BASED IN NEW YORK CITY.

CYRUS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 18

DIRECTORS/WRITERS: Jay Duplass, Mark Duplass
STARRING: John C. Reilly, Jonah Hill, Marisa Tomei, Catherine Keener
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Jas Shelton
STUDIO: Fox Searchlight

John C. Reilly enters the bizarre love triangle

Moderately famous for barely-there budgets and heavily improv'd dialogue, the Duplass Brothers are thrust into the spotlight with A-List actors and studio financing in *Cyrus*, their latest venture. As delightfully awkward as its predecessors *The Puffy Chair* and *Baghead*, this rambling confessional plumbs the depths of neuroticism with Woody Allen-like precision. The plot follows downtrodden divorcee John (John C. Reilly) as he falls for an enchanting woman (Marisa Tomei) who's unhealthily devoted to her adult son, Cyrus (Jonah Hill). The greatest moments in this codependent ménage à trois come from Hill's outrageous manipulations; the Napoleonic man-child threatens John with a barrage of passive-aggressive hilarity, climaxing in harassment via "Subterranean Homesick Blues"-esque signs. While the Duplass benchmarks of hyper-realistic performances and blurred camerawork are intact, the film lacks their adventurous sense of imperfection. But if *Cyrus* helps expose their off-kilter approach to a wider audience, this missile of unsettling honesty is an excellent starting point. **SEAN EDGAR** 7.5

The Good Heart photo courtesy of Magnolia Pictures

THE EXTRA MAN

RELEASE DATE: JULY 30

DIRECTORS: Shari Springer Berman, Robert Pulcini
WRITERS: Berman, Pulcini, Jonathan Ames
STARRING: Kevin Kline, Paul Dano, Katie Holmes, John C. Reilly
STUDIO: Magnolia Pictures

An education in humiliation

There's a moment in *The Extra Man* when modern-day man Louis Ives (Paul Dano) says he feels like he's from the 1920s. That seems about right: Dano has a knack for conveying emotion and sadness that seems utterly out of time (which is partly why his near-mute performance in *Little Miss Sunshine* was so effective). But here, in a bizarre farce about a cross-dressing loner taken in by an enigmatic escort (Kevin Kline) to much older women, Dano's silent-movie star quality doesn't quite gel—the comedy's too broad, too lighthearted, for someone who seems perpetually on the verge of tears. Kline is a deft comedic talent, but he's saddled with a boorish caricature of a role, allowing John C. Reilly (the duo's grizzly-bearded, helium-voiced neighbor) to steal the film. But none of the talented cast is done justice by the lackluster, meandering script—least of all Dano. The poor guy looked like he had more fun getting beaten to a pulp in *There Will Be Blood*. **JEREMY MEDINA** 5.8

THE GOOD HEART

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Dagur Kári
STARRING: Brian Cox, Paul Dano, Isild Le Besco
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Rasmus Videbæk
STUDIO: Magnolia Pictures

When "a change of heart" becomes too literal

The grizzled mug of chain-smoking bartender Jacques (Brian Cox) quivers when he describes himself to his young charge Lucas (Paul Dano) as "a dirty old bastard with filthy habits." At that point, one fears *The Good Heart* will rekindle the duo's shocking man-boy relationship from 2001's *L.I.E.* But rather than craft another coming-of-age story, Icelandic director Dagur Kári has the homeless Lucas attempt to melt the dirty ice of Jacques, a man frozen in bitterness and fussbudgetry. Shot almost entirely on Rasmus Videbæk's handheld camera, a cold, gritty grayness permeates the film as it shuttles between Jacques' musty bar and the sickly glow of a hospital every time the elder protagonist has a cardiac episode (five counted). Unfortunately, the plot's female lead (Isild Le Besco) remains flatlined; rather than giving the gripping Cox a chance to act out his change of heart, Kári makes us squirm through a live transplant. **ANDY BETA** 6.1

WINTER'S BONE

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 11

DIRECTOR: Debra Granik
WRITERS: Granik, Anne Rosellini
STARRING: Jennifer Lawrence, John Hawkes, Dale Dickey
STUDIO: Roadside Attractions

A small film with one big performance

Recently, there's been no shortage of neo-realist dramas depicting the American working-class (*Half Nelson*, *Wendy and Lucy*, *Frozen River*). *Winter's Bone*, the Grand Jury prizewinner at this year's Sundance, is an impressive addition to the list. Jennifer Lawrence stars as Ree Dolly, a 17-year-old struggling to care for her two younger siblings in the harsh, gray woods of the Ozark Mountains. Her mother is near-mute and mentally ill, and her meth-dealing father has gone missing after using their family home as collateral to make bail. Faced with losing everything, Ree navigates the seedy underbelly of her father's meth circuit, determined to find him and keep her family intact. The bleak screenplay (co-written by director Debra Granik) sidesteps melodrama in favor of a murky ending that leans heavily on Lawrence. She's up to the challenge—her shattering performance is easily one of the best you'll see this year. **JEREMY MEDINA** 8.4

WILD GRASS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 25

DIRECTOR: Alain Resnais
WRITERS: Alex Reval, Laurent Herbiet, Christian Gailly (novel)
STARRING: André Dussollier, Sabine Azéma
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Eric Gautier
STUDIO: Sony Pictures Classics

Leave it be

Directed by celebrated French New Wave cinéaste Alain Resnais, *Wild Grass* begins with an image of a clump of its titular foliage growing between cracks in asphalt, the lingering shot allowing the beauty and ugliness of the image to sink in. If only this tedious film could sustain that unlikely balance. Georges (André Dussollier), an aging man with a much younger wife and an unspecified history of violence toward women, finds a stolen wallet belonging to Marguerite (Sabine Azéma), whose explosion of unruly red hair may be the film's most striking visual. He stalks her, she stalks him, and their love, Resnais assures us, is like that clump of grass determinedly growing in an unlikely place. But Georges and Marguerite are less like real people with genuine motivations and more like bundles of allegories, eliciting the viewer's frustration instead of sympathy. Mean-spiritedly theoretical, *Wild Grass* may be endlessly discussible, but ultimately proves to be a disagreeable chapter in Resnais' long career. **STEPHEN M. DEUSNER** 3.8

GET LOW

RELEASE DATE: JULY 30

DIRECTOR: Aaron Schneider
WRITERS: Chris Provenzano, C. Gaby Mitchell
CINEMATOGRAPHER: David Boyd
STARRING: Robert Duvall, Sissy Spacek, Bill Murray, Lucas Black
STUDIO: Sony Pictures Classics

A forgettable fable

Get Low, a glacially-paced portrait of real-life Southern boogeyman Felix "Bush" Breazeale, does little to broaden the scope of American mythology set to celluloid. Robert Duvall stars as the woods-secluded protagonist, who stages a funeral for himself before he's dead, inviting anyone who's willing to recount one of the fantastical, widely-told yarns about his life. Even with this rich premise, *Get Low*'s linear narrative is far too bare-bones to live up to any real-life legend. Competent performances from Duvall, Sissy Spacek and Bill Murray are wasted on a skeletal plot stretched into a mundane slog about an old man seeking redemption. Even worse, the epic fictions of Bush's life are barely addressed, leaving us with an archaic rendition of *Grumpy Old Men* via Washington Irving. **SEAN EDGAR** 5.6

Get Low photo courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics

LOOKING FOR ERIC

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR: Ken Loach
WRITER: Paul Laverty
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Barry Ackroyd
STARRING: Steve Evets, Eric Cantona, Stephanie Bishop, Gerard Kearns, Stefan Gumbs
STUDIO: IFC Films

Lost and found

Ken Loach's films are characterized by gritty realism, but everyone needs an occasional break from that sort of thing. His latest, *Looking for Eric*, maintains elements of social and stylistic vérité, but takes them in a goofy direction by focusing on middle-aged soccer fanatic Eric Bishop as he attempts to rekindle a romance with the woman he left decades ago. In what could be called a mild psychotic breakdown, a hallucination of his hero—soccer superstar Eric Cantona—materializes to help Bishop reassemble his life. The movie's third act takes a sharp u-turn into darkness, though that barely interferes with the overarching humanist vibe. Regardless of the strange tonal shift, *Looking for Eric* is mostly a feel-good comedy that maintains a mature intelligence, despite a gimmicky plot. It may not be what fans of Loach's oeuvre were hoping for, but that shouldn't be held against a film with so many delights, both large and small. **SEAN GANDERT** **7.1**

THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

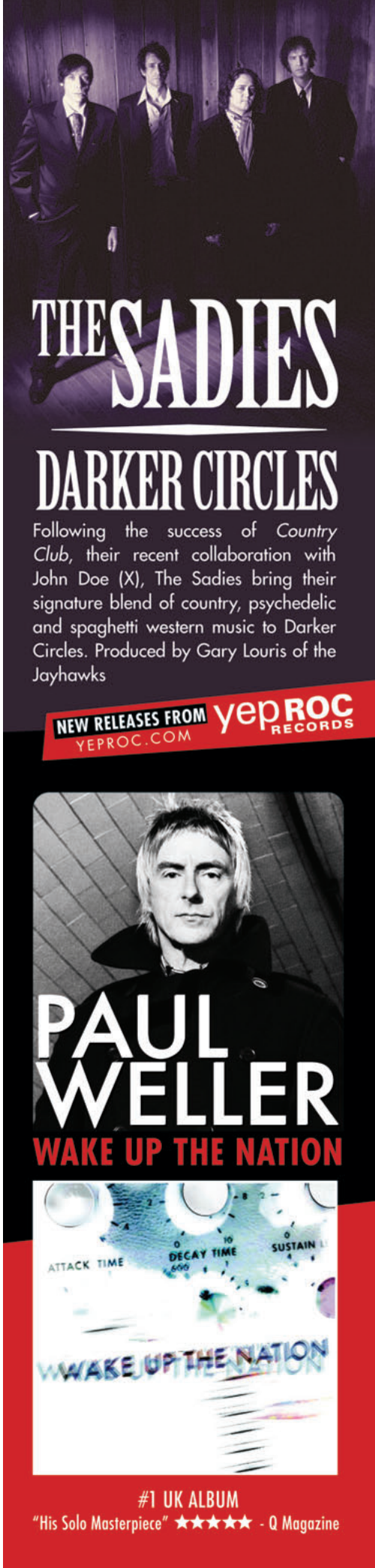
RELEASE DATE: JULY 9

DIRECTOR: Lisa Cholodenko
WRITER: Cholodenko and Stuart Blumberg
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Igor Jadue-Lillo
STARRING: Annette Bening, Julianne Moore, Mia Wasikowska, Mark Ruffalo, Josh Hutcherson
STUDIO: Mandalay Visions/Focus Features

...and so are the lesbian parents, and the surrogate father

"Family" is a fairly fluid notion these days, but Hollywood has been awfully slow to catch up to the zeitgeist: From the Griswolds to the Tenebaums, the all-American nuclear clan has been a steady mom-dad-sister-brother affair, at least on film. But *The Kids Are All Right*, the latest from writer/director Lisa Cholodenko (*High Art, Laurel Canyon*), shows that the white-picket-fence fantasy doesn't have to be so heteronormative. Jules (Julianne Moore) and Nic (Annette Bening), are a married couple raising a pair of bright, engaging teens (Joni, played by Mia Wasikowska, and Laser, played by Josh Hutcherson) in an enviable little cottage in an idyllic California enclave. Both Jules and Nic carried a child, via artificial insemination from the same donor—the irascible, willfully uncommitted Paul (Mark Ruffalo). On Joni's 18th birthday, after Laser convinces her to track Paul down, they slowly incorporate him into the family. There are a few narrative hiccups (Paul, an organic farmer and restaurant owner, needs to hire Jules to help landscape his messy backyard?), and in the wrong hands, the story could have become overwrought or distractingly didactic. But for Cholodenko, the politics are almost incidental. Funny and warm, *The Kids Are All Right* focuses, instead, on what really defines family: love and forgiveness. **AMANDA PETRUSICH** **7.8**

Looking for Eric photo courtesy of IFC Films


THE SADIES
DARKER CIRCLES
Following the success of Country Club, their recent collaboration with John Doe (X), The Sadies bring their signature blend of country, psychedelic and spaghetti western music to Darker Circles. Produced by Gary Louris of the Jayhawks
NEW RELEASES FROM YEPROC.COM
yep ROC RECORDS
PAUL WELLER
WAKE UP THE NATION
ATTACK TIME
DECAY TIME
SUSTAIN
#1 UK ALBUM
"His Solo Masterpiece" ★★★★★ - Q Magazine

BRAIN DRAIN

Science-competition doc fakes heart, leaves no room for smarts

BY NICK SCHAGER

WHIZ KIDS

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR: Tom Shepard
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Tina DiFeliciantonio
STUDIO: Sandbar Pictures

In 2003's *Spellbound*, director Jeffrey Blitz showcased eight kids competing in the 1999 National Spelling Bee. It was utterly superficial documentary filmmaking, trading probing inquiry for easily digestible charm—but it had real heart, which is more than you can say for Tom Shepard's *Whiz Kids*, which takes a similarly soft-nosed look at overachieving youths.

Whiz Kids follows three American high-school seniors preparing submissions for the country's most prestigious youth science contest, the annual Intel Science Talent Search.

Its glibness is apparent from the outset, with bite-sized reports that U.S. students lag behind their international counterparts in math and science, followed by three subjects who are exceptions to this rule. Scary fact followed by reassuring rejoinder, this intro neither frightens nor soothes, since director Shepard isn't interested in examining this supposed state of American educational affairs; he's simply providing a snippet of context to make the ensuing story resonate as an example of contemporary youth's amazing potential.

Photo courtesy of Sandbar Pictures

Long Island's Ana, Staten Island's Harmain and West Virginia's Kelydra have all chosen to direct their prodigious intellectual gifts toward scientific research. Botanist Ana is studying plants' root growth patterns to improve crop cultivation; Harmain is carbon-dating crocodile teeth as a means of providing a proxy evolutionary timeline for humanity; Kelydra is exploring water pollution, a pressing concern given that her community's economy is dominated by DuPont, the largest manufacturer of the Teflon chemical C8, a notorious contaminant of drinking water.

Whiz Kids is frustratingly sketchy, offering little more than crumbs about it's subjects.

Shepard spends the film's early moments criss-crossing between the three kids' lives, showing them formulating their Talent Search projects as their backstories are detailed. But *Whiz Kids* is frustratingly sketchy, offering little more than crumbs about its subjects. As they navigate personal and academic obstacles, it becomes clear that the three go-getters—each coming from a supportive but economically disadvantaged home—is driven not only by the Talent Search's considerable scholarship prizes, but also by an innate curiosity about the world and a desire to make their devoted parents proud. And since Shepard doesn't flesh out his individual snapshots of Ana, Harmain and Kelydra, that's about all we know of them.

At the big competition, two of the kids reach the top 40 and travel to the finals, where euphoria gives way to panic and misery. Despite the director's overt intent to make this final sequence a nail-biter, *Whiz Kids'* home stretch generates little tension. We barely know them; why do we care if they suceed or fail? At any rate, by demonstrating these kids' supreme intelligence and ambition, the film makes the competition's outcome a moot point: Win or lose, all three of these students—over-achievers by every rational standard—are destined for some measure of success.

4.8

➥ NICK SCHAGER IS A NEW YORK CITY-AREA FILM CRITIC WHO WORSHIPS AT THE ALTAR OF KUBRICK AND BELIEVES THAT MOVIES AND SPORTS ARE TWO GREAT THINGS THAT DON'T GO GREAT TOGETHER

LIVING IN EMERGENCY: STORIES OF DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR: Mark N. Hopkins
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Sebastian Ischer
STUDIO: Red Door Pictures

Eye-opening documentary cuts to the heart

As Dr. Arnaud Jeannin explains early on in *Living in Emergency*, "Helping to stop the suffering of people is tremendously rewarding... although it fucks you up a bit." This statement defines the complex nature of this brutally objective film, which chronicles four doctors struggling through their time with Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). Taking an intimate perspective of the NGO (which stations 27,000 workers in nearly 60 countries), the film's grainy footage cuts past surface idealism to expose the mental cost that war and suffering inflict on self-described "bourgeoisie" Good Samaritans. It's nearly impossible to describe their displays of valor as anything less than inspiring, but the doctors here are far from saints; they're argumentative human beings compelled to help their imperfect selves by helping others. The resulting portrait puts the fundamental issues of human rights, politics and self-sacrifice in a hyper-realistic context, offering a provocative backdrop to the universal healthcare argument. **SEAN EDGAR**

9.2

SOUTH OF THE BORDER

OUT NOW

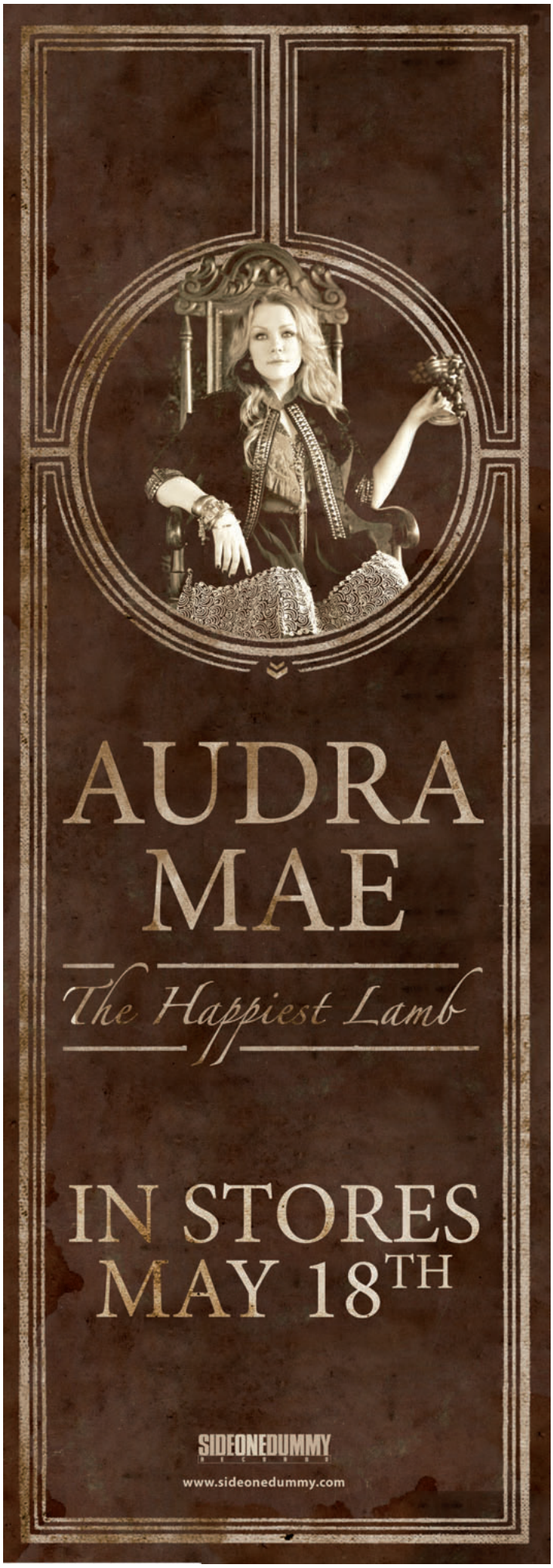
DIRECTOR: Oliver Stone
WRITERS: Tariq Ali, Mark Weisbrot
STUDIO: Cinema Libre

Chávez doc almost goes south

South of the Border, the spiritual sequel to director Oliver Stone's *Looking for Fidel* and *Comandante*, is an academic, interview-driven study of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez—and it seems almost subdued, to the infamously bombastic director's credit. *Border* aims to recast the rise of leftist leaders in South America not as caricatures of freedom-hating dictators, but as long-percolating rejections of imperialism. What *South of the Border* has in access—face-time with Chávez, Bolivian president Evo Morales and Raúl Castro—it lacks in memorable moments. Stone's attempts to humanize leaders by showing them playing soccer (Morales) or falling off a bike at their childhood home (Chávez) are awkward. Still, his defenses of them are passionate and timely, as is his critique of a "predatory [capitalism] that really destroys people." **JEFF VRABEL**

6.8

Living in Emergency photo courtesy of Red Door Pictures



A WALK TO REMEMBER

Criterion unearths a forgotten director's masterpiece

BY ANDY BETA

WALKABOUT

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR/CINEMATOGRAPHER: Nicolas Roeg
WRITERS: James Vance Marshall (novel), Edward Bond (screenplay)
STARRING: Jenny Agutter, David Gulpilil, Lucien John
STUDIO: Criterion

After the 1990 Anjelica Huston vehicle *The Witches*, British director Nicolas Roeg slid into a netherworld of episodic TV fare and direct-to-video oblivion. But the man deserves a nod,

if only for the heady run from his 1970 collaborative directorial debut *Performance* through 1980's harrowing *Bad Timing*. (Just ask Wilco producer, former Sonic Youth guitarist and cinephile Jim O'Rourke, who has three solo albums that namecheck Roeg's oeuvre.) But the director stands apart and above many of his contemporaries on the strength of one masterpiece alone: 1971's *Walkabout*, a perfect cinematic experience.

Walkabout's narrative follows an Australian sister and brother who encounter an indigenous boy performing the traditional Aboriginal coming-of-age rite: the walkabout. Based on the James Vance Marshall book of the same name, Edward Bond's original screenplay totaled 14 pages (barely enough for a short film). In Roeg's hands, it became a meditation on modern rituals and ancient ones, conflicts between the native Aboriginal and invasive European cultures, human language and storytelling, female and male gender roles and the misunderstanding between them, the cruelty of nature and the madness of the modern world.

This madness is dissected from the film's opening sequence, which stands as one of cinema's finest moments. Through fleeting images set against a jarring audio collage of Stockhausen, didgeridoo, and breathing lessons, Roeg deftly juxtaposes outback rock formations with brick walls, and a massive baobab tree with boxy office buildings. The boy (Roeg's seven year-old son, Lucien) observes marching soldiers; his sister (Jenny Agutter) sits in a regimented class while their housewife mother prepares an exotic meal; their father regards his children splashing about in a bright swimming pool that abuts a dark sea.

Later, driving his children to the barren outback for a picnic, the father turns murderous, shouting at his progeny: "We can't waste time!" while unloading a pistol at them, saving the last shot for himself (all the while, Rod Stewart plays on the radio). Uninjred, the siblings are abandoned to stagger through the inhospitable landscape, with Roeg's zoom lens taking in the creatures scurrying about, oblivious to the human intruders. Delirious and near death, the girl shouts at her brother: "We can't waste time!" Soon, the young Aborigine (David Gulpilil) appears and feeds and finds water for the two children. As a trio, they set out into a timeless world littered with detritus of industry.

Weird vignettes crop up to break the meditative mood—there is, for instance, bawdy Italian comedy involving weather balloons and a factory with Aborigines working for a white boss. But it's the wordless relationship between the Aboriginal boy and Australian girl—both on the cusp of becoming adults in their respective societies—that is the film's heart and soul. It's a star-crossed coupling, with neither able to understand the other: The girl communicates in a language that's alien to the boy, while the poignant, ritualistic mating dance he performs for her approval frightens rather than charms.

> Roeg stands apart and above many of his contemporaries on the strength of one masterpiece alone: 1971's *Walkabout*, a perfect cinematic experience.

When describing the filmmaking process for *Walkabout*, Roeg disingenuously said: "We didn't really plan anything—we just came across things by chance... filming whatever we found." But Agutter, now grown, recalls the opposite: "There's nothing in the film that just *happened*." Nearly 40 years on the film remains enigmatic. It's a commentary on unresolvable conflicts between races, cultures, generations, sexes; a vision that is at once primal and sophisticated. When the film circles back at the coda, we realize we've just traversed a brutal—yet flawless—cinematic landscape.

10.0

Photo courtesy of Criterion

BOOGIE MAN: THE LEE ATWATER STORY

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Stefan Forbes
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Forbes
STUDIO: InterPositive

The devil's in the details

What profits a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? That's the implicit (and explicit) spiritual quandary at the core of *Boogie Man*, a gripping documentary chronicling the tumultuous life and miserable death of the infamous Republican strategist-cum-rockstar Lee Atwater. Atwater's sins and successes are deftly edited into a riveting, blink-and-you'll miss narrative: his meteoric rise as a young-blood kingmaker of the GOP; his genius orchestration of the so-called culture wars through the Southern Strategy and related ultra-negative political campaigns; his eulogy by then-Secretary of State James Baker as "Machiavellian... in the very best sense of that term." There's plenty of fodder for news junkies, including vintage (and outrageously vitriolic) campaign commercials, and '80s TV footage of Atwater's protégé, an eerily ageless Karl Rove. There's also a genuine tragedy underneath these slick politics—the heart-wrenching story of a man consumed by his willingness to lie, cheat and betray in the name of fame and power. **MICHAEL SABA** 8.3

STAGECOACH

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR: John Ford
WRITERS: Ernest Haycox, Dudley Nichols
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Bert Glennon
STARRING: Claire Trevor, John Wayne, Thomas Mitchell
STUDIO: Criterion / Walter Wanger Productions

The legendary western that begat more legend

By the time director John Ford had cast the role of the Ringo Kid for *Stagecoach*—loosely based on a short story by Guy de Maupassant—both the genre he was working in (the Western) and the actor he snagged (a towering Iowan named John Wayne) were entrenched in the backwaters of B-movie-dom. But when Ford's camera zooms in on the Ringo Kid, saddle in one hand and Winchester rifle in the other, against the stunning and inhospitable Monument Valley landscape, one can't help but feel a rush. This 1939 landmark, crisply restored by Criterion, is a masterful sketch of surprisingly complex characters (town drunk, Southern belle, gambler gentleman, milquetoast midwesterner, brassy floozy, blowhard banker, etc.) thrown together on a journey through Apache country. It's easy to marvel at legendary stuntman Yakima Canutt's death-defying moves, and enjoy the soundtrack that recast American folk songs—or you can simply be gripped by the thrill of the ride. **ANDY BETA** 9.3

DARIA: THE COMPLETE ANIMATED SERIES

OUT NOW

CREATORS: Glenn Eichler, Susie Lewis
STARRING: Tracy Grandstaff, Wendy Hoopes, Julián Rebolledo
NETWORK: MTV

The OG alternagirl ur-text

After nearly a decade of fever-pitched fan demand, MTV has released the legendary cult animated show *Daria* in one series-encompassing eight-DVD box set. Spanning 65 episodes, the pilot and two TV movies, this brilliantly realized and before-its-time portrait of teenage disaffection would be completely formulaic if it hadn't, you know, done it first and best. Dysfunctional family life, moronic and status-obsessed peers, psychotic teachers—so goes the über-sarcastic Daria Morgendorffer's quiet desperation in the suburban wasteland known as Lawndale. Watching this series makes it easy to locate a major point of origin for the beefy brand of irony that defined the aughts: the subdued—yet no less rapid-fire—wit of *Daria*'s titular outsider-heroine. It's also painfully obvious that Diablo Cody owes this show's creators several figures worth of back royalties. So when the crushing malaise of postindustrial life gets you down, remember the jangle that became a generation's clarion call: La-la-laaa-la-la! **MICHAEL SABA** 9.2

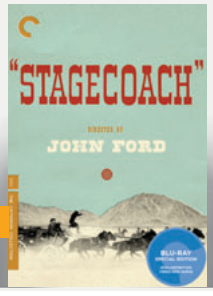
FUEL

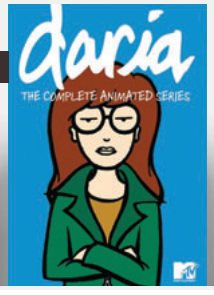
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 22

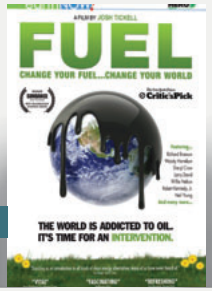
DIRECTOR: Josh Tickell
WRITER: Johnny O'hara
CINEMATOGRAPHER: James Mulryan
STUDIO: Cinema Libre Studio

Begs for a higher octane

From the documentary's outset, Josh Tickell says that *Fuel* is his story—a claim that, at first, proves to be true. Within its first ten minutes, the 2008 Sundance winner journeys through Tickell's formative years in Australia and Baton Rouge, where he discovers the benefits of alternative fuels and—beginning with a science fair project—the clandestine love affair between Big Oil and the U.S. government. Photos serve as evidence of how he thrives off his first taste of the conspiracy; a pained witness, his mother testifies to oil-related water contamination and, in turn, birth defects throughout their Louisiana hometown. But as *Fuel* drills deep into politics, photos are replaced by charts better suited for *USA Today*, and the narrative devolves into generic commentary by Woody Harrelson. At its climax, when two scientific reports seemingly undo all of his efforts, *Fuel* reels footage of Tickell walking alongside an ocean shore, each step siphoning away more of his initial gravitas and gusto. **CHRISTINA LEE** 4.0







Fuel photo courtesy of Cinema Libre Studio

INTELLIGENT DESPAIR

Darwin biopic misses some links

BY MICHAEL SABA

CREATION

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR: Jon Amiel
WRITERS: John Collee (screenplay), Randall Keynes (biography)
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Jess Hall
STARRING: Paul Bettany, Jennifer Connelly, Jeremy Northram
STUDIO: Lionsgate

"The fact of evolution is the backbone of biology, and biology is thus in the peculiar position of being a science founded on an improved theory, is it then a science or faith?" So Charles Darwin mused in the introduction to *On the Origin of Species*, the text that established evolution as the tentpole theory of the biological sciences, and drove a permanent wedge between science and a creationist interpretation of the Bible.

Darwin's acute awareness of this conflict—science or faith?—is the tension at the core of *Creation*, a biopic based on the biography *Annie's Box* penned by Darwin descendent Randal Keynes. It's gripping material: a man struggling with a veritable Pandora's Box, knowledge that will irrevocably alter the foundational power structures of his age—not to mention the fibres of his own family. And though more than 150 years have passed since *Origin*'s publication, that same controversy endures; the subject of evolution is so contentious that the film couldn't find a distributor for a Stateside theatrical release.

Creation could be a prime vehicle for much-needed meditation on these conflicts. But the film mostly skirts weighty philosophical and political issues and opts instead for period drama about Darwin's family life. It can be somewhat difficult to envision Darwin outside of that iconic black-and-white photograph of a stern-looking man sporting a beard worthy of Merlin, but director Jon Amiel aims to tell the story of the personal struggles behind the formation of a revolutionary theory.

Paul Bettany's Darwin is a physically and mentally ailing forty-something, chockablock with ennui over his work and deteriorating family life. We discover the root of the Darwin clan's lassitude through a series of well-timed flashbacks: Daughter Annie (a precocious Martha West) shared her father's scientific vigor, and her death at age 10 devastated her parents; losing Annie destroyed Darwin's religious faith, but only strengthened his wife Emma's (Jennifer Connelly). Left with little else to do but contemplate his research, Darwin struggles over releasing the findings of his expedition on the H.M.S. Beagle, the trip that formed the origin of *Origin*, knowing how deeply it will shake the scientific and Christian communities.

His scientist peers urge the reclusive Darwin to publish his work; one delights in the possibility that the book will "kill God," which is precisely why Darwin fears the reaction of his wife and their family friend Reverend Innes (the delightfully stodgy Jeremy Northram). Bettany does a workable job as the leading man; his Darwin sulks and broods through murky and near-Gothic sets, a contemplative frown and furrowed brows his main modes of expression. And Connolly plays the scolding Emma to the hilt, with a seemingly infinite reservoir of frilly gowns, wistful eyes and innumerable stern reprimands for her husband.

It's gripping material: a man struggling with a veritable Pandora's Box, knowledge that will irrevocably alter the foundational power structures of his age.

Despite *Creation*'s attempts to humanize Darwin through the reliable movie trope of genius-via-feverish-insanity, the film feels less like an attempt at a quasi-factual historical biography than a BBC family drama in period dress. Maybe that's because we know how it ends (spoiler alert: Darwin publishes the book, science and religion butt heads for 150 years and counting), but the portrait we're given of the man is hardly conclusive. Still, *Creation* is a smart, richly conceived story that does justice to its pedigree. For now, Darwin and Evolutionary-Biology enthusiasts craving the whole story will have to be content with the mountains of biographical material already published. But for the layperson, this missing link does a fine job of filling its own spot in the fossil gap.

7.0

Photo by Liam Daniel. Copyright RPC Nature Ltd.

CLOSE-UP

OUT NOW

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Abbas Kiarostami
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Ali Reza Zarrindast
STARRING: Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Abolfazl Ahankhah
STUDIO: Criterion

Up close and personal

In one of *Close-Up*'s courtroom scenes, you can hear the just-off-screen Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami direct his subject: "This camera is here so that you can explain things which people might find hard to understand." If only. In this uncanny conundrum of a film, first released in 1990, the camera casts doubt on all it observes. A reporter follows a story about a man who has just been arrested for impersonating famed Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf; is he a criminal or just a cinephile? Or does he stand in for something greater? Shot without artifice (or was it?) Kiarostami's camera meditates on cinema and the creative act, and the lie inherent in each. "I wanted to make them forget the idea that a film director is different from other people," the accused states at one point in his defense. But come the final act, when we observe the imposter's meeting with his doppelganger through a cracked windshield, a clutch of pink flowers obscuring their profiles, the façade becomes evident. **ANDY BETA** 7.9

CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM: THE COMPLETE SEVENTH SEASON

OUT NOW

CREATOR: Larry David
STARRING: David, Cheryl Hines, Jeff Garlin, Jerry Seinfeld
NETWORK: HBO

No need for restraint

"You have the tiny little insecure infantile mind of a 12-year-old," an infuriated woman screams at *Curb Your Enthusiasm* protagonist/antagonist Larry David before attacking him in the second episode of the show's seventh season. She's not alone in her perception, or her rancor. And the most recent installment of the show—essentially David's infantile mind writ large—may be its cagiest yet. David explores "the unwritten laws of society," as he puts it to Christian Slater in one episode, mashing-up wheelchairs and Rosie O'Donnell (Ep. 5); bared midriffs, Mickey Mantle's bat and a weeping Jesus portrait (Ep. 6); *West Side Story*, shoplifted pants, and women's lingerie (Ep. 8). It all culminates in a reunion of the original Seinfeld cast (in reality, David produced the show; on *Curb*, its a ploy to win back his ex-wife) for a season finale that's both funnier and, weirdly, more poignant than the show about nothing's acutal end. **ANDY BETA** 8.9

MARY AND MAX

OUT NOW

WRITER/DIRECTOR: Adam Elliot
STARRING: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Toni Collette, Eric Bana
STUDIO: IFC Films

Heartfelt and humble

In 2009, a banner year for animation, one film got lost in the shuffle: the wispy, melancholic stop-motion oddity *Mary and Max*. The Aussie import, directed by Adam Elliot (Oscar-winner for his short *Harvie Krumpet*), tells the story of two kindred spirits who do something unheard of in modern times: They write letters to each other. Mary (a cute-as-a-button eight-year-old Australian) nor Max (an overweight forty-something New Yorker with Asperger's) have no friends, so the two instantly bond over their loneliness and mutual appreciation for chocolate. Gradually, their odd connection becomes the defining relationship of their lives. Even though Elliot struggles with pacing (the film loses steam once Mary grows older), the story is, above all, a triumph in tone; blending a bizarre mix of Australian humor, magical realism and dark drama, the film manages to be at once childlike and adult—a rare feat for animation in this, last or any year. **JEREMY MEDINA** 8.1

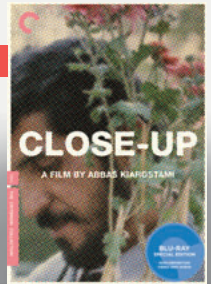
8: THE MORMON PROPOSITION

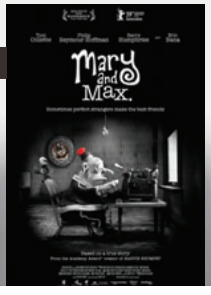
RELEASE DATE: JULY 13

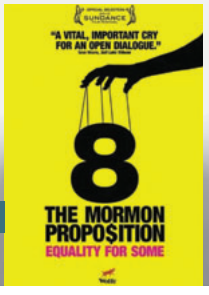
WRITER/DIRECTOR: Reed Cowan
CO-DIRECTOR: Steven Greenstreet
CINEMATOGRAPHERS: Reed Cowan, Chris Volz
STUDIO: David v. Goliath Films

Should have died in committee

The passage of Proposition 8 in California was a devastating blow to gay rights in America. And, at least according to the central conceit of *8: The Mormon Proposition*, its success was due to funding and support from the Mormon Church. The documentary attempts to show how the church quietly rallied its members around this cause for what was initially an unpopular provision, and boasts an impressive level of research and relatively slick approach. Still, *8* treads murky waters in its second half, and spends more time than it should on the faith's general treatment of homosexuality, eventually drifting into an unpleasant streak of overt Mormon-bashing. The film also fails to take into account the many other factors in play during the 2008 election, narrowing events down to one all-encompassing Mormon-based explanation. *8* means well, but is too blinded by its own biases to do its cause justice. **SEAN GANDERT** 4.0







Mary and Max photo courtesy of IFC Films

DEGENERATION OF A LOST GENERATION

American psychos

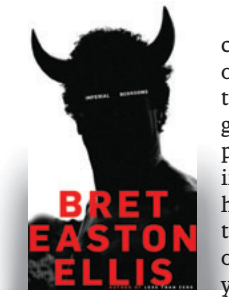
BY CHARLES MCNAIR

BRET EASTON ELLIS

Imperial Bedrooms

[FICTION] KNOPF

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 15



What good does *Imperial Bedrooms* do? Why is it written?

Does it entertain? I submit that any reader who finishes this novel and is able to use that word for it—"entertaining"—might honestly want to take a hard look in the mirror and question the condition of his soul.

Does it offer a glimpse of our modern condition? If *Imperial Bedrooms* rings true to the world you know, how bleak must your life be?

Is it a good mystery? Maybe, if you can find mystery in a book where you don't like or admire or care for a single character.

Does it rise to a reasonable standard as literature? You decide. Here's a passage:

One night the girl tried to escape from the house and the boy and I chased her down the street with flashlights and then onto another street where he tackled her just before dawn. We dragged the girl quickly back inside the house and she was tied up and put in what I had told them to refer to as the kennel, which was her bedroom. "Say thank you," I told the girl when I brought out a plate of cupcakes laced with laxative and made the girl and boy eat them because it was their reward. Smeared with shit, I was pushing my fist into the girl and her lips were clinging tightly around my wrist and she seemed to be trying to make sense of me while I stared back at her flatly, my arm sticking out of her, my fist clenching and unclenching in her cunt, and then her mouth opened with shock and she started shrieking until the boy lowered his cock into her mouth, gagging her, and the sound of crickets kept playing over the scene.

Ah ... crickets! Add poetry to sadoporn—is it literature?

Is this novel what Ellis' career has come to? This whiff-of-desperation retread chocked with gratuitously lurid passages? This study in debauchery? Does he mean to employ the same old trick of shocking his way, yet again, into the literary limelight? Or is he admitting that this is what a writer has to produce today—less fiction than *freaktion*—to cut through the smothering clutter of TVs and tweets and friendings? It's a question for all writers: Must fiction now lap dance and drink human blood to get noticed?

The week before *Imperial Bedrooms*, I read Ellis' 1985 debut novel *Less Than Zero*. (In May, Vintage released a re-jacketed 25th-anniversary edition.) It was debatable enjoyment. But talent and intelligence gleamed through the window Ellis opened onto this land of the living dead, and the book certainly made a case, justified or not, for his ordainment as a dark horse among rising writers. *Less Than Zero* chronicled the utter wasteland between the ears and inside the souls of ultra-privileged Los Angeles high school grads. We saw the scions of our laughing aristocracy—the kids who might have been the best our culture could offer—lost at sea in the age of a nascent MTV, when cocaine and weed fueled the thoughts and actions of rebels-without-a-cause-or-clue in Reagan's America, when uncommitted coupling went on as frequently and randomly as it does among atoms flying loose in space.

The protagonist of *Zero*, Clay, could be named for his particular kind of feet. He's unanchored to any deeper attachment than his own. He floats from bed to bed, drug to drug, party to party. He does possess a soul—Clay cries a lot, wants to cry even more—and *Less Than Zero* feels like a primal scream. But as a reader, I felt too much of the time like a pillow the writer beat during therapy.

A reviewer for *USA Today* called *Zero* "*Catcher in the Rye* for the MTV generation." In truth, Clay is closer to Camus' nihilistic Stranger, star-crossed by the benign indifference of the universe, than to Holden Caulfield. In this instance, Clay and his cast of 20-something friends must endure the terrible curse of having simply everything a human could possibly want. Their parentless, aimless, selfish, privileged indifference left me cold, then annoyed, then simply angry. To Ellis' credit, he made me believe in his fictional personalities in this book—enough to want to knock the hell out of them, to slap some sense into their silly, self-absorbed heads.

Imperial Bedrooms trades on the success of *Zero* a quarter century ago. We find ourselves circulating with Ellis' same sad, rotten cast and crew, aged 25 years, at a hellish party that never seems to end. Clay has grown up to write screenplays. The old L.A. crowd he comes to visit from back East hasn't improved much. They're still coupling and uncoupling, still drugging and debauching. They sport tans, get scary face lifts, attempt to sleep their way to fame. They disappear, then turn up in the desert with their heads and hands severed, or on snuff videotapes where they're being tortured to death. Maturity has replaced any vestige of their innocence with cruelty, scheming, addiction, and—here's the word—depravity.

Why is a book about these people worth reading? I spent four hours of the only life I have pondering the question.

What does Ellis ask us to learn?

He means for the nasty passage quoted above to demonstrate the monstrousness of Clay, to show how Clay (get it?) has been shaped into a most hideous thing by the soullessness of Los Angeles, and likely some *American Psycho* teratism in his DNA. So that's our theme: Here Be Monsters.

If that's news, this is the book for you.

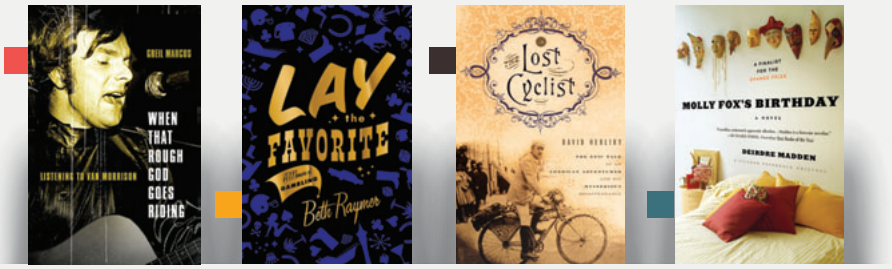
Imperial Bedrooms leaves you with a terrible, smutty, unsettled feeling. In book after book, Ellis has chosen to work from the most disturbing edges of fiction. You must naturally wonder at some point what such an abiding obsession with shock means. Is something unspeakable from time to time leaping the fictional firewall between work and author? Is Ellis an artist? Or something else, with crickets?

After reading *Imperial Bedrooms*, I wanted to call an exorcist.

You may wonder, too, what possessed you to pick up this book.

0.0

➥ CHARLES MCNAIR IS *PASTE*'S BOOKS EDITOR.



GREIL MARCUS

When That Rough God Goes Riding: Listening to Van Morrison

[NON-FICTION]

PUBLICAFFAIRS

OUT NOW

Rough and ready

With this piercing retrospective of Van Morrison, Greil Marcus holds court as the dour doyen of cultural criticism.

No small task—his subject is a man whom, Marcus once wrote, "can be compared to no other in the history of modern popular music." To that end, the book analyzes album covers, radio charts, public appearances, and other anecdotal points in the singer-songwriter's storied history, dissecting and threading this host of disparate everyday moments into a gripping yarn.

Marcus's prose is volatile, yet measured: He flirts with bombast, presenting a way-over-the-top section comparing blues-rock to self-punishment, immediately after a somber and astute meditation on the likenesses between Morrison and Bob Dylan.

"Ordinary life, after all, guarantees only death and oblivion," he writes of Morrison's 1997 LP *The Healing Game*. Maybe so, but not for Van Morrison, and definitely not with writers like Marcus illuminating new facets of his legacy.

MICHAEL SABA 8.2

BETH RAYMER

Lay the Favorite

[NON-FICTION]

SPIEGEL & GRAU

OUT NOW

What happens in Vegas

So much for the days of *Mad Men*, when a staid job in the secretarial pool was everything a girl could want post-college.

Beth Raymer's autobiography of her wanderlustful lifestyle (in-home stripper, a bookie's Girl Friday, spare-time boxer) seems an endless race from convention—or perhaps an honest attempt to grab every possible slice of life.

Lay the Favorite is an amusing, often absurd, peek behind the gambling curtain. Raymer's cohorts are no intellectual lightweights, and one comes to wonder how much these high rollers really differ from the titans of Wall Street. Beneath the quirky personas of her engaging characters lie compulsive personalities that cannot escape the lure of the game, and the endless adrenaline-pumping—and possibly heart-stopping—risk it entails.

IRENE CLARK 8.5

DAVID V. HERLIHY

The Lost Cyclist

[NON-FICTION]

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 18

A book that never gets its balance

In this follow-up to his encyclopedic *Bicycle: A History*, Herlihy eschews color photos and glossy pages in an attempt to build a historical narrative surrounding turn-of-the-20th-century American cyclist Frank Lenz, who was murdered while traversing a politically unstable Turkey. The story equally concerns William Sachtleben, another "globe girdler," who eventually accepts the task of searching out Lenz's remains.

Although Herlihy clearly did his research, he fails to sift out and emphasize potentially engaging historical elements, and the narrative pedals too hard, becoming a blur of unmediated tidbits. The two interludes of black-and-white photos prove more interesting than the text itself, which falls victim to trite descriptions and repetitive transitions.

While the book will probably find an audience in die-hard fans of cycling or *belle epoque* culture, those looking for the "epic tale" advertised on the book's cover will ultimately find themselves wishing for a better set of wheels.

CASEY MCCORMICK 5.0

DEIRDRE MADDEN

Molly Fox's Birthday

[FICTION]

PICADOR PAPERBACKS

OUT NOW

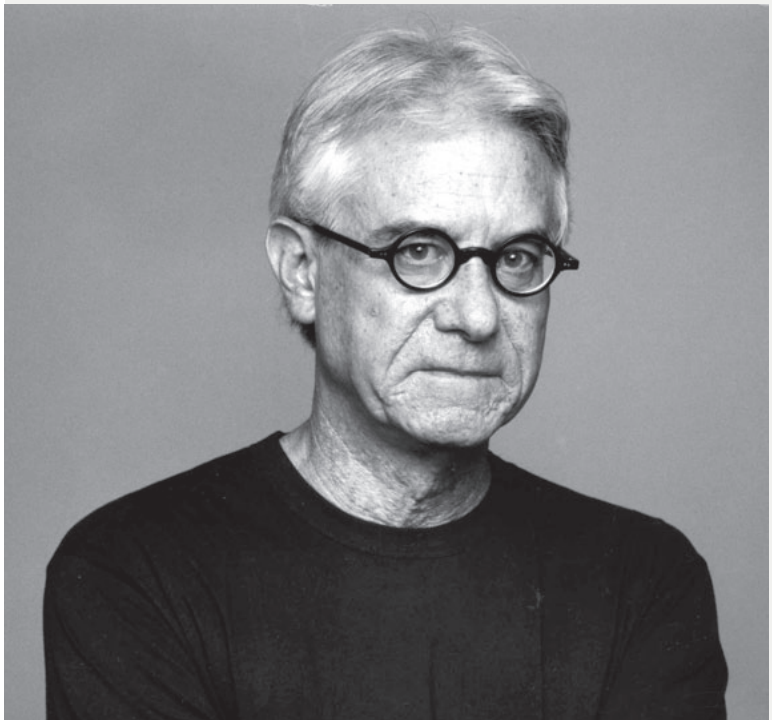
It's all in the details

Early in Northern Ireland writer Deirdre Madden's ninth book, two characters discuss a church-floor mosaic. "[It] was just gorgeous," the unnamed protagonist's friend Andrew says. "[T]he colours—terracotta, cream, bottle green, all in patterns and shiny."

Molly Fox's Birthday takes place during a mid-summer day in Dublin. It's a simple story of three old friends who reconnect, reminisce and ultimately drift apart. The plot resembles a mosaic—what you first thought was a coherent image shatters, and you see instead a painstakingly assembled collection of chipped jewels and broken glass.

The thousand quiet moments shared by these characters, in flashbacks and in the present, raise questions of religion, Irish politics and identity. As the Solstice afternoon nears dusk, and the novel its close, you see how the placement of each word, and of intimate memories, are essential to the story's whole.

RACHEL DOVEY 5.0



Greil Marcus photo by Thierry Arditti

HAVE GAME, WILL TRAVEL

Celebrated journalist does some videogame soul-searching

BY JASON KILLINGSWORTH

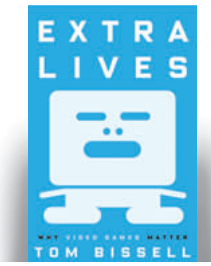
TOM BISSELL

Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter

[NONFICTION] PANTHEON BOOKS

In April, legendary film critic Roger Ebert doubled-down on an assertion he first leveled in 2005: *Videogames can never be art.* His unflinching blog-post dismissal stung gamers the world over, eliciting countless rejoinders. A friend of mine summarized the ensuing fallout quite nicely: "Never have so many gamers expended so many words insisting they don't care what a film critic thinks of them."

Tom Bissell's newest book *Extra Lives* goes out of its way to avoid such taxonomical hair-splitting. The author is less concerned with defining videogames than with weighing their emotional impact and



capabilities as a vehicle for storytelling. "Anyone who can tell you what a game is, or must be," he warns early on, "has seen advocacy outstrip patience." Bissell's writing portfolio encompasses everything from literary criticism to fiction to history to memoir, but he's a travel writer at heart. His debut book *Chasing The Sea* recounts journeys through Uzbekistan, to which he returned several years after his initial visit in 1996 as a Peace Corps volunteer.

There's a theme of compulsive, Kerouacian movement running through Bissell's entire oeuvre, and *Extra Lives* is no different. Only now, the author's explorations find him not only moving around the globe—Talinn, Las Vegas, Rome—but also through richly imagined digital worlds as far-flung as postapocalyptic Washington, D.C. (*Fallout 3*), war-ravaged African savannas (*Far Cry 2*), and human-colonized outposts in the starry cosmos (*Mass Effect*).

The beauty of travel is that it not only illuminates the world we move through, but the interior world we're forced to consider as we encounter people, places and customs that chafe our sense of what's proper. Bissell stresses that this sort of catalytic bewilderment also occurs in videogames.

He recounts an experience he had playing Ubisoft's first-person shooter *Far Cry 2*. His character got into a firefight with two militiamen in the waist-high grasses of the African savanna; he dispatched one aggressor as the other—wounded and bleeding out—took potshots at him from the grassy cover. Bissell writes: "When I had put enough distance between us, I lobbed a Molotov cocktail into the general area where the supine, dying man lay. Within seconds I could hear him screaming amid the twiggy crackle of the grass catching fire. Sitting before my television, I felt a kind of horridly unreciprocated intimacy with the man I had just burned to death.... The game may reward your murderous actions but you never feel as though it approves of them, and it reminds you again and again that you are no better than the people you kill. In fact, you may be much worse."

Extra Lives is the first truly indispensable work of literary nonfiction about society's most lucrative entertainment medium. Bissell's commentary is marvelously astute and his enthusiasm for games makes even his words on the printed page feel positively backlit. Any breathless adoration for the medium he doles out, however, takes on additional weight because of his willingness to admit when a game falls on its face.

Extra Lives is the first truly indispensable work of literary nonfiction about society's most lucrative entertainment medium.

In his chapter about the widely admired *Fallout 3*, he calls the inclusion of a greaser-style youth gang in the game's 23rd-century setting "the working definition of a dumb idea." He also refers to moments of "tofu drama" dialogue so wooden they "make [*Twilight* author] Stephenie Meyer look like Ibsen." Still, the game's creative hiccups do little to diminish Bissel's overall appreciation.

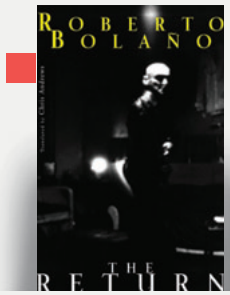
Lives' crowning moment arrives in the final chapter, "Grand Thefts." Bissell delivers a harrowingly unguarded account of a period when he was addicted to both cocaine and *Grand Theft Auto IV*, burrowing through boilerplate family-values rhetoric to explain why he finds the game such a towering creative achievement: The player's unexpected kinship with protagonist Niko Bellic, a Serbian immigrant just off the boat in Liberty City (a fictional NYC) and looking for a fresh start.

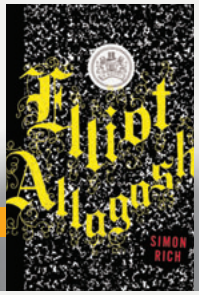
"Niko was not my friend, but I felt for him, deeply. He was clearly having a hard go of it and did not always understand why. He was in a new place that did not make a lot of sense. He was trying, doing his best, but he was falling into habits and ways of being that did not reflect his best self. By the end of his long journey, Niko and I had been through a lot together."

9.2

➥ JASON KILLINGSWORTH IS *PASTE*'S GAMES EDITOR. HE WRITES A WEEKLY VIDEOGAME COLUMN FOR *PASTE*'S WEBSITE AND THINKS ALOUD ON TWITTER @JASONKILL

Photo by Trisha Miller





ROBERTO BOLAÑO

(TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY CHRIS ANDREWS)

The Return

[FICTION] NEW DIRECTIONS

Take my life, please

In this posthumous collection, Russian gangsters discuss the merits of Bulgakov's lesser-known work, an African *fútbol* player recruited for a Spanish team may or may not be doing blood rituals in an injured teammate's bathroom, and an international porn aspirant soothes the psyche of a dying industry legend.

The Chilean-born Bolaño died in 2003, leaving his eager worldwide audience with rough comedy and erotic nightmares based on first-hand experience with an oppressive government and literary exile. *The Return* brings us again to these worlds, though the book also conveys a tender spiritualism.

Justified excesses seduce and haunt the reader in this sexy-spooky masterwork. Here, a hard-partying Parisian comes to know the afterlife as a kind of therapy session with a necrophiliac fashion designer, and the author himself appears, consorting with a past literary mentor in a dream. "You're not going to believe this, Bolaño, but in this neighborhood, only the dead go out for a walk." **8.2**

ROBERTO ONTIVEROS

SIMON RICH

Elliot Allagash

[FICTION]

RANDOM HOUSE

Poor little rich boy

At the heart of 26-year-old *Harvard Lampoon* and *SNL* writer Simon Rich's rib-tickling first novel is a modern tall tale of the Allagash family, enriched beyond human comprehension by inheriting the patent on paper. Each time you read, spend or wipe, Elliot Allagash cleans up.

But wealth is power. And power corrupts. So Elliot is an evil billionaire—and still only in high school. "You're lucky you can still experience pleasure," he explains to Seymour, the high-school *schlemiel*. "I've become accustomed to a level of decadence so extreme that to go without luxury for even a minute fills me with a powerful rage." Elliot, for kicks, sets out to transform Seymour into the most popular kid in school. He's aided by a cunning evil butler—a Jeeves with Bernie Madoff's heart.

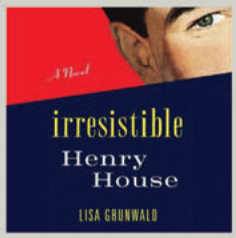
There's much to chuckle over. Rich flashes a gift for satire, and his book feels cinema-ready. In fact, I bet Allagash money is already in some producer's pocket. **9.0**

CHARLES MCNAIR

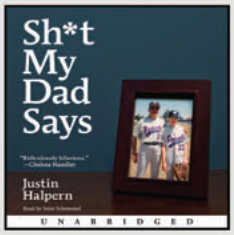
Roberto Bolano photo courtesy of New Directions Publishers

PASTE RECOMMENDS @ AUDIBLE.COM

It
by Stephen King
Narrated by Steven Weber



The Irresistible Henry House
by Lisa Grunwald
Narrated by Oliver Wyman



*Sh*t My Dad Says*
by Justin Halpern
Narrated by Sean Schemmel

The Flight of the Creative Class
by Richard Florida
Narrated by Mark Boyett

The Bedwetter
by Sarah Silverman
Narrated by Sarah Silverman

audible.com

BANAL FANTASY

Breathtaking presentation undone by restrictive design

BY KIRK HAMILTON

FINAL FANTASY XIII

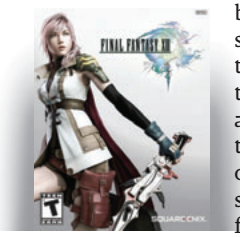
DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360

There is perhaps no gaming lineage more storied than the *Final Fantasy* series. Since its 1990 debut on the NES, the franchise has released nearly 50 titles in North America—story-driven sagas, real-time strategy games, cart racers and minigame collections.

As the old joke goes, there is nothing particularly "final" about this fantasy. A more appropriate (but less catchy) title might be "Iterative Fantasy," since Japanese developer Square Enix has demonstrated an uncommon commitment to tweaking, refining and occasionally overhauling the games from installment to installment.

Final Fantasy XIII is Square-Enix's latest revision of the RPG formula. Though significant changes have been made to the series' design and mechanics, its narrative feels as familiar as ever: A ragtag bunch of heroes (with improbably-proportioned weaponry and fabulous hair) are drawn together to rescue a world in peril.

Actually, make that two worlds—the story begins on the idyllic planet Cocoon, and later relocates to the surface of its satellite, the mysterious Pulse. At the outset, the government of Cocoon has initiated a purge, killing or exiling any citizens who have come into contact with a recently discovered Pulse-



being. The game's six protagonists are thrown together in the resulting chaos and eventually team up, embarking on an epic quest to save both worlds from destruction.

Final Fantasy XIII's greatest triumph is its presentation. The graphics and design are real jaw-on-the-floor stuff, especially during the game's incredible pre-rendered cutscenes. Masashi Hamauzu's lush and endearingly genre-hopping musical score is equally lovely, perfectly complementing the ethereal beauty of the game's visuals.

Final Fantasy XIII's writing and storytelling, however, are a mixed bag. Many of the main characters are well-conceived, particularly the brooding swashbuckler Lightning, who is as strong and compelling a female lead as gaming has lately seen. Male leads Sazh and Snow at first appear to be boilerplate JRPG stereotypes (jive-talking comic relief and overconfident young dreamer, respectively), but the game ultimately reveals them to be well-written, sympathetic characters.

But it wouldn't be a JRPG without a few annoying children flailing about, so *Final Fantasy XIII* gives us the cowardly young man Hope and the discomfitingly sexualized girl Vanille. Both characters, especially plucky Vanille, are a constant source of irritation, grunting and cooing their way through the game.

Character gripes notwithstanding, *Final Fantasy XIII*'s story is both epic and consistently engaging. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the game's pacing. The first 20-odd hours of its approximately 60-hour length are spent moving in a brutally restrictive straight line, endlessly swinging from battle to cutscene to battle to cutscene to battle.

The linearity initially lends the game a sense of momentum, but things get tedious as the hours tick by, particularly when slogging from chapters three through nine. New areas no longer conjure feelings of excited discovery, but rather weary trepidation and bleak mental math: How long is it going to take me to clear *this* level? The tedium is not helped by dialogue like, "We cannot look back! We must keep moving forward!"

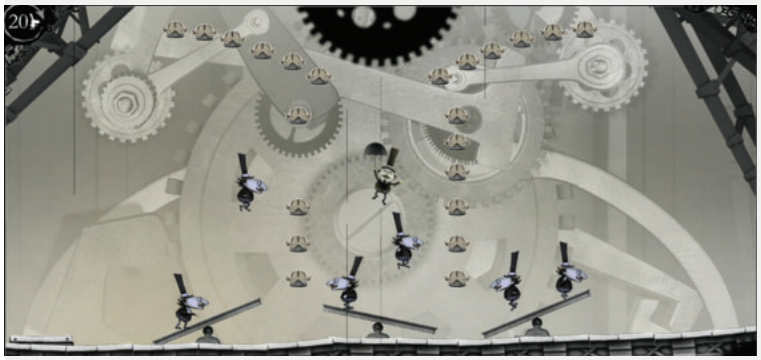
Final Fantasy XIII's story is both epic and consistently engaging. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the game's pacing.

Fortunately, the game's battle system is fun, well-designed and deceptively deep. Battles are fought in real time via the Paradigm System, which allows for immediate re-arranging of party members' roles (i.e. Medic, Spellcaster, Tank, Debuffer). Since players only control one character per battle, strategy revolves around timing paradigm shifts to tactically respond to the changing state of the battlefield. Then again, the depth of the system doesn't come close to the likes of *Dragon Age: Origins* or the *Final Fantasy* series' own *Tactics* games. And anyway, eye-popping graphics and a cool battle system don't automatically make for a great gaming experience.

Some third element, be it a collection of minigames, deeper side-questing, meaningful choice, more exploration: *Something* else is needed to sustain a game like this for 60 hours. When all is said and done, *Final Fantasy XIII* feels unbalanced and strangely unfinished, like a beautifully constructed, lustrously polished chair with only two legs.

6.8

KIRK HAMILTON IS A SAN FRANCISCO-BASED MUSICIAN AND WRITER. HE'S AN EDITOR AT GAMERMELODICO.COM, AND WRITES ABOUT MUSIC, GAMES AND CULTURE FOR A NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS.



THE MISADVENTURES OF P.B. WINTERBOTTOM

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: THE ODD GENTLEMEN
PLATFORM: XBOX 360 (XBOX LIVE ARCADE)

A quirky Xbox Live puzzler? It's about time.

Like the 2008 smash indie game *Braid*, *P.B. Winterbottom* conjures temporal conundrums, but to modest ends—its protagonist simply wants to collect pies. That's the whole plot. This pastry hunt inspires dozens of devious puzzles to test players' wits, with each level containing a number of pies to collect, often within a time limit. It's impossible for one person to do alone; fortunately, Winterbottom can record temporary clones of himself that run in a loop. As challenges become more difficult, orchestrating the clones starts to feel like building a complex machine—several moving parts must work in perfect harmony. The game is presented like an Expressionist film, all stark shadows and impossible angles, with a jaunty piano score providing sinister undertones. Goofy premise notwithstanding, the fresh aesthetic and time-twisting gameplay make *P.B. Winterbottom* as irresistible as the pies that tempt its hero. **8.0**

MITCH KRPATA

MEGA MAN 10

DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
PLATFORMS: XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3, NINTENDO WII

When an angry robot-baseball isn't enough

When Capcom asked the team at Inti Creates, "If you could put all your best *Mega Man* ideas into a new game, what would you make?" the result was *Mega Man 9*. Then Capcom asked, "What else ya got?" And so now we have *Mega Man 10*, an unpolished sequel that shows signs of developer fatigue. *MM10* isn't a disaster; the wacky cast of bosses includes Strike Man (a huge cybernetic baseball) and Sheep Man (just what he sounds like), and dozens of bite-sized "challenge" stages provide a pleasing diversion when the journey to Dr. Wily's lair feels like too much. Yet the main quest's raggedy level design suffers from a chronic lack of follow-through, often introducing a new enemy or obstacle and forgetting about it soon after, which roughly approximates the overall experience of playing the game. **7.4**

JOHN TETI

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THE DEVASTATION AGENT

Wake me when there's nothing left to explode

BY JOHN TETI

JUST CAUSE 2

DEVELOPER: AVALANCHE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
PLATFORMS: XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3, PC

In *Just Cause 2*, as secret agent Rico Rodriguez—a gruff superspy with a heart of gold—players have free reign to unleash mayhem in the Southeast Asian country of Panau. The island is a geographical hodgepodge; snowcaps tower within 10 kilometers of scorched desert while tropical-forest villages lie beneath sparkling skyscrapers. Tucked into these gorgeous landscapes are hundreds of military outposts, whose glittering gas tanks and radio towers practically beg you to blow them up—and you spend the entire game doing just that. The game is one long, glorious dream of destruction.

There's a reason you're supposed to destroy everything—something about an evil dictator and oil and Russo-Sino relations—but logic would only spoil the playground vibe, so the story wisely gets short shrift. You simply wreak havoc because you can. You have a grappling hook, an always-on-call parachute and a huge supply of heavy weaponry—plus access to every land, sea and air vehicle imaginable. What else are you going to do?

Grappling hooks are usually a fancy way to get from point A to point B. While Rodriguez's hook can work that way, it's more impressive when used as an impromptu slingshot. Shoot the grappler at a distant building, start retracting the line and let go at the last second to deploy your parachute—you're flung into the sky, drifting with a feeling of weightlessness. Repeat the trick in mid-air and you can essentially fly. If you're trying to get anywhere in *Just Cause 2* on foot, you're doing it wrong.

It takes a couple of hours to get comfortable with the grappling maneuvers, but once you have them under control, they open up the loopiest tricks in the game's deep playbook. Say the enemy army scrambles a helicopter to gun you down. Just grapple on, clamber up the windshield and kick out the pilot to take the controls yourself. (Punchline: When the bad guys figure out what you've done, their solution is inevitably to send another helicopter. Guess what you do next?)

> Like any vivid dream, *Just Cause 2* makes perfect sense in the moment; it's only when you wake up that it seems insane.

In a more serious setting like *Splinter Cell* or *Metal Gear*, all the outsized espionage would seem pretty stupid. It works here because the developers maintain a campy—if mildly offensive—sense of humor about the whole affair. The ethnically diverse cast of characters is drawn with all the sophistication of a *Clutch Cargo* cartoon, and your Panuan foes are hapless louts. They'd almost be lovable if they didn't keep screaming the same handful of lines—"He's bleeding like a peeg!"—every time you run into them.

Most games try to convince you that everything you do really matters; *Just Cause 2* takes the opposite approach. Its commitment to unrealism deflates any notion of consequences. So you wind up going nuts, which is how you find yourself attaching a moped to the back of your truck to swing it around as an impromptu wrecking ball, or leaping off the nose of a jetliner to reach an aerial sex club held in place by two blimps. You could say that the events of *Just Cause 2* make no sense, but that's not quite right. Like any vivid dream, everything makes perfect sense in the moment; it's only when you wake up that it seems insane. And with an enormous world that could take more than 100 hours to explore, *Just Cause 2* makes it dangerously easy to hit the snooze button.

9.0

JOHN TETI IS A WRITER BASED IN NEW YORK. HIS WRITING CREDITS INCLUDE THE *A.V. CLUB*, *EUROGAMER* AND *THE DAILY SHOW WITH JON STEWART*.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL
PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
PLATFORMS: XBOX 360, PC

Scattered reboot succeeds in spite of itself

After a notoriously hectic development cycle and at least one design overhaul, *Splinter Cell: Conviction* has finally been released. The original series' third-person, stealth-action formula is mostly intact here, though the pace has been dialed up significantly. Enemies are numerous and aggressive, particularly on the (recommended) "realistic" difficulty setting, and players must keep moving to avoid an ignoble death. Fortunately, the third-person controls are fluid and easy to use, particularly the cover mechanic and the "mark and execute" system. Presentation issues detract, the worst offender being the truly awful in-game dialogue. The story is similarly weak, with frequent and bizarre interactive torture sequences. And yet in the game's two-player co-op, which nearly outshines the single-player campaign, plot contrivances and level-design issues melt away, leaving only you, your friend and the thrill of the hunt.

KIRK HAMILTON

7.1

MODNATION RACERS

DEVELOPER: UNITED FRONT GAMES
PUBLISHER: SONY
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION 3, PSP

As cute as you want it to be

There have been plenty of cutesy kart-racing games over the years, but *ModNation Racers* has one thing they don't: an almost overwhelming level of customization. As a racer, this arcade-style game is on par with *Mario Kart* et al—responsive, arcade-style controls, offensive and defensive power-ups (lightning strikes, shields) and plucky characters that are beyond adorable. But unlike *Mario Kart*, where your racer always resembles Ron Jeremy, *ModNation* lets you change the look of your driver, your car, even the racetracks. In fact, the level of customization—which puts this game on par with *LittleBigPlanet*—can actually be a bit much. For example, you've got hundreds of options for your character's mouths and eyes alone, even though you rarely see their faces when they're racing. Thankfully, the emphasis on customizing doesn't take away from the fun of steering your little guy around the tracks, especially when your opponents are online friends who've clearly spent more time Frankensteining their drivers than racing.

STAN WIDROW

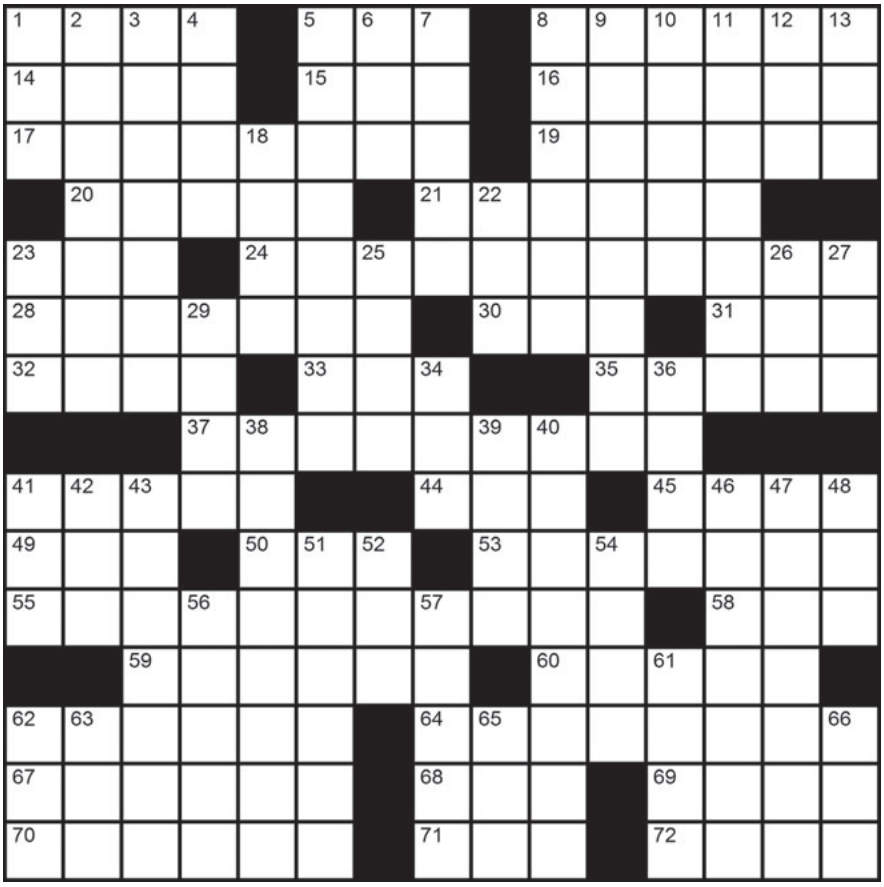
8.2

ModNation Racers

CROSSWORD

GETTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER

BY BRENDAN EMMETT QUIGLEY (BRENDANEMMETTQUIGLEY.COM)



ACROSS

1 Peddle
5 "Tennessee ___" (Grateful Dead song)
8 Harry Potter's incantations
14 Blunted blade
15 Tolkien baddie
16 Joined
17 *EVENT MAP*
19 "Am not!" comeback
20 Article of faith
21 ___ of Death Metal
23 ___ Canterbury (salesman on the BBC's *The Office*)
24 *ADORNED GUNS*
28 Copeland of The Police
30 ISP with a butterfly logo
31 Microbrew choice
32 Anti-fur org.
33 Certain theater, shortened
35 Third-stringers
37 *HIP SEX TIE*
41 Ziti, e.g.
44 ___ *It Be* (album by either The Beatles or The Replacements)
45 Way, way off
49 "Ciao!"
50 Deviation
53 African capital
55 *JR DEALS UZIS*
58 Yeasayer's ___ *Blood*
59 Allergic reaction
60 Connect
62 "Beats me!"
64 Each of the italicized clues in this puzzle
67 Clear sky's lack ___
68 ___ Georges Leningrad
69 "Rock of ___"
70 Create a new home
71 ABBA hit
72 Broadcast

DOWN

1 Cool, once
2 Mineral that's No. 5 on the Mohs scale of hardness
3 Intro interruption
4 Astute
5 *The Yankee Years* author
6 White-tailed eagle
7 747 competitor
8 Guitarist Boz ___
9 Lingo
10 Arab leader
11 Makes no attempt to save
12 John, to Ringo
13 ___-Caps
18 ___ Verde National Park
22 Capt.'s superior
23 Cooking meas.
25 BYU football rival
26 Org. that goes after polluters
27 *Tropic Thunder* setting
29 Light bulb unit
34 *LIP*
36 Boris Godunov, for one
38 Clods
39 *Hercules* spinoff
40 Russian news agency
41 Brown bag staple
42 Affirmative vote
43 50 minutes spent with a shrink
46 News clip
47 Belly
48 Free from, with "of"
51 The Rays' div.
52 Michael Jackson musical, with "The"
54 "Cool, man!"
56 Excessive
57 Burning passions
61 "-zoic" things
62 ATM maker
63 "___ Buttermilk Sky"
65 *The Matrix* hero
66 Label started by Black Flag

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THE AVATAR EFFECT

BY SEAN GANDERT | ILLUSTRATION BY JESSE LEFKOWITZ

"Even though the 3-D renaissance is still nascent, Hollywood is already planning the next step: throwing open its vaults. As they prep dozens of new 3-D films, the majors have been quietly exploring the idea of converting some of their most valuable library titles to the new technology."

DAVID S. COHEN,
VARIETY, APRIL 2009

FROM: Prime Focus Group visual effects and View-D post-production

TO: Studios involved in 3-D conversion of old movies

Everyone, we'd like to thank you for revolutionizing outside the box on this endeavor. Why create new films when we have more than 100 years of archives to reformat in 3-D and re-release in theaters? Plus, if this goes as planned, all those new HD television sets will be obsolete by 2012, due to the many movies and TV shows needing 3-D sets to get "the complete experience." I think we can all taste the new houses, boats, houseboats and wives we'll be able to afford. Still, we have a few suggestions about your choices:

We're not sure that, at the end of *Citizen Kane*, Rosebud needs to *"blow up in your face,"* as you put it in the conversion notes.

Remember to merchandise. A commemorative barf bag tie-in (possible Taco Bell sponsorship?) could complete the 3-D *Bourne* experience.

Bringing documentaries into 3-D *could* appeal to audiences, but we're thinking more along the lines of *Planet Earth* than *Nanook of the North*. Also, *Reefer Madness* has already made for some killer office parties over here.

We're excited to have George Lucas involved. But we'd prefer that he not shoot those proposed new scenes with Darth Vader waggling his lightsaber at the camera. Also, some of prequel footage we've seen features comically stiff acting and what sounds like temp dialogue. Are you sure that wasn't a working print?

Getting the "3-D, visceral feel" of *Deliverance* might not be desirable for all audiences.

Couldn't we save on costs for *Rocky* by only converting the first movie and just changing the title sequence on the sequels?

Admittedly, *Boogie Nights* seemed like a good idea, but test screenings of the movie's last scene haven't gone that well—except in a few cases where they went perhaps a little *too* well.

Can we upscale *Avatar* into 4-D? Whatever, just tell Cameron he's got another half-billion being wired to his account.

➥ SEAN GANDERT IS CO-HOST OF *THE DIRECTOR'S CUT* RADIO SHOW AND A FREELANCE WRITER BASED OUT OF WHEREVER HIS CAR TAKES HIM. LIKE *KNIGHT RIDER*, BUT WITH A LAPTOP.

PASTE (ISSN 1540-3106) JUNE / JULY 2010, ISSUE 63 IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY PASTE MEDIA GROUP, 619 E COLLEGE AVE, STE E, DECATUR, GA 30030. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT DECATUR, GA AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. RIDE-ALONG ENCLOSED IN VERSION 2. **POSTMASTER:** SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO PASTE, P.O. BOX 292382, KETTERING, OH 45429.

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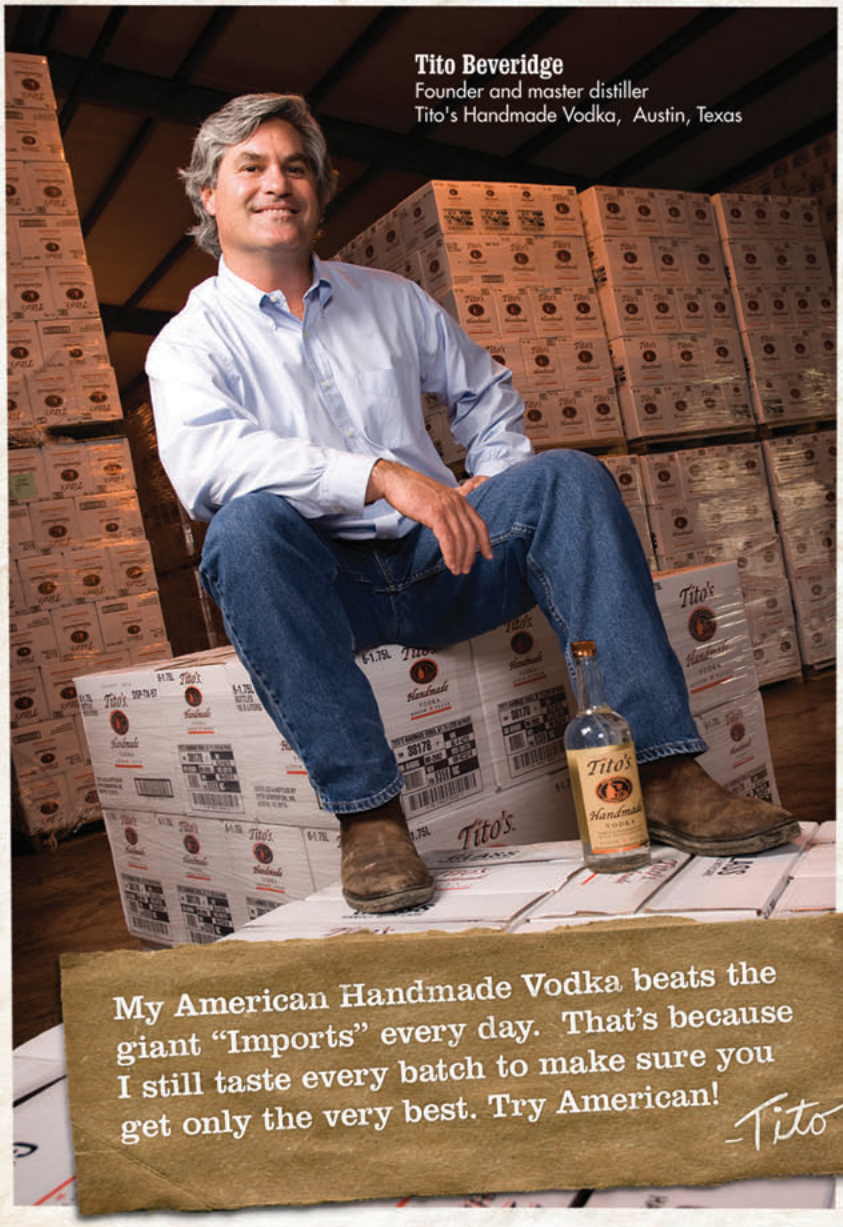
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Wine Enthusiast reviews

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